

A Crisis in Democracy: Brexit and the 2017 General Election in an Age of Post-Truth

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(Signature)

Acknowledgements

This thesis owes a significant amount of debt to a lot of people.

Firstly, to all the participants who took part in the Brexit and General Election Q-Sorts and enabled this thesis to become a detailed and informative piece of research.

Secondly, to my thesis supervisor, Professor Clare Saunders, whose guidance and support with the creation of this thesis has proved invaluable. In addition, I'm indebted to Clare for her pastoral support when some administrative academic hurdles and personal family issues became particularly challenging.

Thirdly, to G and S who motivated me to keep going through thick and thin.

Finally, to my mother for being my sounding board and who has shuttled me back and forth to this beautiful Penryn Campus since 2013 and to my Grandad Glyn, who sadly passed away during the writing of this thesis but who, despite his age, voted with the majority of the youth of this country and had fantastic views on Brexit which spurred me on with my research. Grandad – they still have not sorted this Brexit mess out and you can see from up there that I finally managed to finish this thesis before the UK has sorted out its relationship with the EU if it ever sorts itself out.

Abstract

A Crisis in Democracy? Brexit and the 2017 General Election in an age of Post-Truth

The newspaper media of the United Kingdom has, in the past, been seen to have been an influential source in guiding and reflecting the views of voters on salient political issues of the day. With the advent of an age of post-truth and the increasing scepticism of objective facts and statistics in many quarters, the aim of this research has been to see how media portrayals of issues and voters were expressed in the media in comparison to the opinions of those who voted for the victorious side in those debates. Primarily, it seeks to answer the question “Do media portrayals of sides in a debate exaggerate political conflict and do research participants think that they exacerbate it?”

Through the use of discourse network analysis, a broad picture of the relevant discourse was produced followed by testing the salience of these discourses (using Q-Sort methodology and a short qualitative questionnaire) amongst two separate groups of 15 university attending Leave voters and 15 university attending Conservative voters to gather their opinions on the key topics in the discourse.

By researching the issue, it became evident that whilst discourses were more complex than might first have been assumed (particularly in the case of the 2017 General Election), there was a large variety of opinions expressed by participants with regards to the issues discussed that were not adequately reflected in the press. Participants felt, in general, that the discourses around both the Brexit Referendum and the 2017 General Election had both become too personally focused in attacks and more polarised than was warranted.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research project explores the relationship between media discourses that claim to represent the views of voters and young people's reaction to those discourses. In particular, it focuses on the views of young people on the winning side in the General Election of 2017 and The Brexit Referendum. Are these young voters' views really as close to the common stereotypes purported or are they, as Mycock and Tonge (2012) suggest, a special kind of voter by virtue of their age group?

This work has taken place during an unusual time in UK politics. Since the Referendum of 2016, politics in the United Kingdom has in many ways been stuck in a paradoxical status whereby political parties have been in a permanent state of flux whilst normal day to day government activity has stagnated.

In the intervening period since the announcement of the Brexit Referendum result and the final written draft of this work, many changes have occurred in both Parliament and within the major political parties.

Since David Cameron's resignation in June 2016, the main political parties of the UK have basically been in a state of chaos. During the last three years there have been two Conservative party leaders (Theresa May and Boris Johnson), three Liberal Democrat leaders (Tim Farron, Vince Cable and Jo Swinson) and UKIP's leadership has changed to such an extent that they have had elections for their party leadership every year since 2016 with a minimum of two leaders per year being the norm. The three other parties of the UK have remained more stable: Jeremy Corbyn managed to see off a leadership challenge by Owen Smith for the Labour party in 2016, whilst the Green Party's Biennial leadership tradition has run a stable course with Jonathan Bartley remaining one of the two co-leaders throughout the period. Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the SNP (currently the third biggest party in parliament) has stood the test of time remaining in charge of the SNP throughout this period.

During these three years, the spectre of Brexit has loomed large over the politics of the UK and it is not hard to see a link between that dominant issue and the resulting turbulence within party politics.

Whilst the political parties have been busy with internal party management issues, the workings of Government and policy decisions have witnessed a period of stagnation and neglect during these past three years as the Government tries to work out how to implement the result of the Referendum and leave the EU. In the modern era, the only government to have been defeated more times in Parliament was Jim Callaghan's minority administration which ran for just over two and a half years and suffered thirty-four defeats. In just over two years, Theresa May's government has suffered thirty-three Parliamentary defeats and several votes were avoided because the Government knew that they would not be able to pass the legislation involved.

The cause of May's woes was in many respects down to a failure of her own making. Having called for an election in 2017, the Conservatives dramatically failed to return their majority and, in fact, lost seats when at the start of the campaign they were on track for a majority near or beyond three figures according to the polls of the time. The tiny majority (produced with the aid of the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland) in the House of Commons throughout that period has caused the Government to stagnate. Other than Brexit, few significant policy changes which one would expect to see during the normal course of a Government have taken place.

It is in this turbulent political atmosphere, consistently characterised by political conflict (between the different Referendum sides, political parties, and even within nominally unified political groups), that many young people have become politically engaged (Sloam and Henn 2018). The 2016 Referendum and the 2017 General Election, both events being of key importance to the future of the country, were the first opportunities that many of these voters got to exercise their political franchise.

At the same time as these momentous changes were taking place, much of the primarily right-wing newsprint media was still feeling the self-validation of one of their biggest success stories in years, having finally achieved a long-term goal of separating the UK from the European Union. Decades of Eurosceptic stories and general anti-EU sentiment and tone combined with a nervous Conservative leader threatened by the spectre of Nigel Farage's UKIP, resulted in an EU referendum in which the right-wing press's chosen side was victorious in what was often a vicious campaign. This result was only tempered by an election a

year later in which their chosen party, whilst still nominally victorious, suffered a large loss of seats leading to an unstable status quo.

The mixed fortune of those positions which the media has supported in the current age brings to mind questions of just how relevant the newsprint media remains and begs the question – can it remain relevant to a newer generation? Stories of years of decline in newsprint numbers would imply they could soon hold little power especially in a climate in which the youth of today are no longer turning to traditional forms of media for current affairs.

In a modern society in which conflict between political opponents dominates headlines both here and abroad, do newspapers still have a future in which their importance in framing the tone of political and economic debate is still relevant? Or, is their traditional role now defunct with the rise of other forms of media, especially forms of media that are not controlled by the traditional press barons but by individuals whose individual clout on a monetary level may be minimal but who otherwise obtain a wider reach?

In the following thesis, I will attempt to add to discussions that have already taken place in recent years on this subject (some of which are discussed in subsequent chapters) through a study of the discourses around Brexit and The General Election of 2017. This work, which was undertaken using Discourse Network Analysis and Q-Sort Methodology, attempts to analyse young voters who supported the Leave Vote in the EU referendum and the Conservative Party in the 2017 General Election and the effects, if any, that they believed the media might have had in portraying the Remain/Leave and Conservative/Labour conflict.

Young voters have been chosen in this case because of the theorised uniqueness of their voting patterns (Mycock and Tonge 2012). The specific focus on young Leave and Conservative voters is due to the fact that these young voters have gone against the majority vote of their age group despite these views often being shunned or reviled by others (Bettiza 2017). This situation is enhanced in many university settings where the views of young voters are perhaps even more strongly weighted towards both Remain and the Labour Party/ Liberal Democratic Party. Their contradictory perspective when viewed against the mainstream of their contemporaries (despite being the

majority view of the voting UK public) offers a fascinating contrast which is otherwise at risk of being ignored, especially due to the criticism these opinions can face in a setting that is more hostile to such views.

I will try to ascertain whether discourses in the print media still have an effect on young voters, especially those who voted in the manner which the majority of the mainstream press approved of, even if it went against the general trend amongst their peer group. This research has been carried out with the primary aim of contributing more information to the question of just how influential the newspaper media still remains in today's world by way of Q-Sort Methodology and Discourse Network Analysis and it begins by asking the following research question:

RQ 1: “Do media portrayals of sides in a debate exaggerate political conflict and do research participants think that they exacerbate it?”

To provide additional context and additional information on the media's effects, two more sub-research questions will also be used:

RQ 2: Are young Leave and young Conservative Party General Election voters more nuanced in their political positions and values than media portrayals imply?

RQ 3: Has the media successfully turned opinion on different sides into truths in the eyes of their target audience? To what extent do research participants treat media opinion as truth?

In addition, when studying the media, it would be unwise to ignore the headlines and storylines the newspapers themselves are covering which researchers themselves are likely to hear. Particularly when these storylines are relevant to the primary question in hand. A researcher must be willing to explore their key questions in more depth. Hence the following hypotheses will also be tested:

Not all young Conservative Party or young Leave voters agree with many key Leave/Conservative policy issues.

Both young Conservative Party and young Leave voters will agree with media portrayals of left-behind voters.

Both young Conservative Party and young Leave voters will hold strong views on caricaturised portrayals of voters and Parties from both their side and the losing side.

These hypotheses were inspired by major talking points in newspapers at the inception of this project during post-Referendum and post-General Election discussions which the popular press orchestrated to explain the Leave vote and the weak Conservative vote. In doing so they aim to ascertain the level of influence that the newsprint media still enjoys or whether there has been an evaporation of such influence, a view often espoused in recent years. The final aim is to contribute more to the important and ongoing debate of the traditional media's relevance in a world which is seeing increasing attention given to non-traditional forms of media.

The ultimate results of this investigation offer surprising insights into how, even in a climate of what has been perceived as the terminal decline in the newsprint media in the United Kingdom, this form of media still wields a strong influence on public opinion and the political conflict that can arise from this.

Therefore, the specific objectives of this thesis are:

1. To map the Newspaper Discourses present on both sides of the debate in the Brexit Referendum and the 2017 General Election utilising DNA.
2. To understand how young Conservative and young Leave voters' views compare and contrast with media stereotypes utilising Q-Sort methodology.
3. To use a follow up survey combining questions, both quantitative and qualitative, to understand young Conservative and young Leave voters' views on the ways in which the campaigns were conducted.

CHAPTER 2

WHY NEWSPRINT MEDIA MATTERS FOR ELECTIONS

This chapter questions the notion that newsprint media are out-dated and outmoded for setting the political agenda. It investigates their significance at shaping political and social media agendas. It concludes that, even though they may not be direct readers of the print media that there is a high likelihood that young people will be influenced. The chapter then discusses how print media sought to influence the Brexit Referendum and 2017 General Election.

In recent years, the newsprint paper media has been thought to be in terminal decline and, in its conventional paper format, this is correct. The ABC's (Audit Bureau of Circulation) figures have shown a steady decline in circulation numbers for most papers in the UK. The closure of the Independent newspaper in its printed form in 2016 is evidence of this trend (although it remains prominent as the tabloid I paper and continues to have a significant online presence). As a result, it has become easy to make the link that the industry itself is in overall decline, particularly in its significance with younger readers. There is additional evidence that this might be the case.

The problems identified with snacking on the news and the resulting repercussions, were discussed by Brown (2005).

"How news executives today deal with the ways news is consumed, in the form of an image here, an instant message there, a cell phone text message headline, a web portal story or a newspaper shoved into a passing hand while racing to the bus, will say a great deal about the future of news as we know it". (Brown 2005)

The significant literature around "Snacking" on bite size chunks of the media absorbed in an often-hurried fashion is important when discussing how media is analysed today. As Molyneux (2018) found in his study on smartphone usage with regards to news consumption in the United States, this habit is particularly pronounced with regards to smartphone usage. As Staid et al (2014) demonstrated in their 2014 study on younger groups in Europe, younger children (aged 9-12) were already spending a significant amount of their time on smartphones and this had risen dramatically just in the three years from 2010 to

2013. Habits learnt in childhood do not go away as is evidenced by the Office of National Statistics report on internet usage in the UK (2018) which indicates that 98% of 16 to 24-year olds use mobile phones to access the internet and that 92% use such devices to access the Internet “on the go”.

Therefore, mobile phone usage among the young and analysis of the news through bite size chunks would seem to indicate that the national newsprint media would not be as influential in setting the tone of political discourse as might first be assumed. However, this does not match up with the reality of the situation on the ground. What is striking at first is that for a business in perpetual decline, the newsprint media industry remains profitable for the most part in the UK (Edge 2019). Apart from *The Guardian*, most newspapers in the United Kingdom still make a reasonable profit. This particular point will be explored later in the chapter.

Needless to say, announcing the complete death of the newspaper industry, at least in the UK, would seem to be a premature decision. Many of the significant players in the arena remain active and despite the view that the newspapers are in decline, the national papers still seem to carry great weight amongst the political classes, other kinds of media and the general public.

Firstly, in the case of the general public, there is still evidence that newspapers have significant sway over their readership and politicians indicating an ability to set the agenda despite a lack of official power. Their influence has been significant in the past ever since the media’s ability to influence the agenda was first explored by McCombs and Shaw (1972) when they investigated the opinion of 100 residents of Chapel Hill in 1968. Even in a position of overall declining power, newspapers still have enough clout to make a difference. As Reeves et al (2016) found in their study on *The Sun* newspaper’s endorsement of Labour in 1997 and The Conservatives in 2010, there is evidence that newspapers can have an influence. The effect was equivalent to a boost of 2% in the popular vote for whichever side the paper supported even though the paper’s reporting and its overall coverage remained in line with its readers’ values. Whether these effects are still as pronounced today is open to debate, as is whether other papers’ endorsements can impact upon their readerships voting choices, but even if the influence is small, the effect can be significant. This may be at least partly down to the national reach which many papers possess in the UK. Whilst

many local titles may suffer, as Edge (2019) showed in the debt incurred by companies purchasing local titles, the national titles remain mostly profitable, with the exception of *The Guardian* which does experience significant losses.

The Media with regards to Brexit and the 2017 General Election.

As Startin (2015) notes, Eurosceptic attitudes have been mainstreamed in the UK press over recent years and the overall treatment of the European Union was linked directly with issues such as immigration. One particular attitude specifically that of a “hard Euroscepticism” that we would now associate with the Leave campaign, Startin explicitly calls out as originating in *The Daily Express*. This paper was the first of the national papers and the most influential within the British Press in advocating for a more extreme position on leaving the European Union. It should be pointed out at this point that this does not mean that other members of the right-wing press were not Eurosceptic for some time. Since Maastricht, many were outrightly hostile, but the *Daily Express* was in many respects a pioneer in this regard. This mainstreaming of Eurosceptic attitudes in much of the UK media has had a chilling effect on much of the debate. As Usherwood and Startin (2013) found, the pervasive amount of Euroscepticism in much of the mainstream and in most of the right-wing media had led to the other side of the debate being left unheard compared to the Eurosceptic side of the debate. Economic realities and potential benefits of EU membership were cast aside in favour of a general narrative that emphasized the EU as a primarily French and German driven institution out to damage British interests. As Anderson (2004 p.154) stated with regards to *The Sun* newspaper’s coverage, *The Sun* is “‘vigorously and virulently Eurosceptic, conjuring up the image of the EU as a corrupt and untrustworthy predator, driven by a Franco-German plot to damage British economic interests, British security and British sovereignty.’

The impact of this on how the British public views the European Union cannot be understated. In what has been over 20 years from the signing of the Maastricht Treaty to the 2016 EU Referendum, there was a concerted effort to disparage and degrade the EU, making it an “other” that could be blamed for many of the economic woes that the country might suffer and portraying it as an enemy of British life.

The newspapers in fact may have been what initially brought the country to the point of referendum. As noted by Startin in the 2015 article previously discussed, the *Daily Express* was a key driver behind the *Have your say* campaign designed to pressure the government to call a referendum in the first place. In combination with UKIP support, the *Daily Express* can be viewed as a key factor in why the referendum was ever seriously considered.

Therefore, when it comes to influencing policy, the newspapers would seem thus far to still exert significant influence on policy makers and voters who are part of the direct readership.

It must be remembered however, that many voters do not directly read newspapers and increasingly, as we saw above, many take part in reading just bite size chunks of news. However, just because young voters are not sitting around directly reading paper copies of these newspapers does not mean that they still do not have an effect.

There is visible evidence that the national press still influences public broadcasters. As Cushion et al (2018) found in their study of newspaper stories, those very same stories were covered by national broadcasters because much of the television news takes its lead from the press. Of great interest when it comes to the topic of Brexit and the General Election of 2017 is how the broadcasters have responded to the newsprint media in the past. With the exception of Channel 4, the major news broadcasters in the UK all took their lead from *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* regarding which stories to lead with on policy during the 2015 General Election. This, in the context of Brexit and the 2017 General Election, offers an intriguing glance at the power that the press still holds and, in the case of the 2017 General Election, may have enabled discourses such as those purporting that Jeremy Corbyn is sympathetic towards terrorism to take root in the popular consciousness to some degree, as the newsprint media often portrays him as a terrorist supporter (Cammaerts et al 2016).

The fact that the newspaper press still significantly impacts upon the televised airwaves is of major interest in a study on the impact of the attitudes of young voters and why their opinions on the relevant newspaper coverage still matters greatly. Although television is a declining influence in many homes and

especially amongst young people (Twenge et al 2016), the narratives television produces are still present and being talked about in many homes where older adults with different habits are more likely to engage in the conventional watching of televised news. The key feature of the discussion regarding television news is that even if a participant may not feel as though they have been absorbing a newspaper's coverage of events, the fact that the newspapers still guide the debates in a significant way through the absorption of their narratives into those used by televised news means that newspaper narratives influence even those who do not read them.

However, at the crux of the matter is whether newspapers would still have an influence on young people who primarily absorb their information online or through social media. Existing literature provides a mixed answer. As has been covered before, the influence of social media in the absorption and dissemination of news is an important one. Ofcom's 2018 report (Ofcom 2018) provides the most up to date report on this for the UK. Within the report there are many useful facts to be gleaned about online news media coverage in the UK particularly with regards to the Brexit Referendum and the General Election on which a substantial amount of information (particularly on the former) can be found.

A large amount of news is disseminated through posts as opposed to direct links and articles which might initially imply that traditional newspaper media outlets will be bypassed. However, this turns out not to be the case as the report identifies in Section 8 (Figure 8.5) that many of the newspapers' websites still attract viewing figures from the age demographic 16-24 (which covers roughly the age range of people in this study). Papers such as *The Guardian* and *The Independent* demonstrated a higher than average rate of online views from those aged 16-24. For *The Guardian*, the UK viewership of their news website in this age range was at 20% and for *The Independent* the figure stood at 10%, compared to a lower number of 17% for *The Guardian* and 8% for *The Independent* for the average citizen of the UK. What is clear from looking at these figures is that the mainstream news media's influence, even if it is no longer read about in the conventional press, still has a significant impact on young people as a source of news.

The direct behaviours undertaken during the Referendum by Leave and Remain supporters points to the relevance that the newsprint media still possesses over campaigns via their contact with people over social media. As Bosetta et al (2016) found, engagement amongst voters was not found on the campaign pages of the main Remain and Leave Campaigns, but the source of most comments was in fact on the related mass media sites who came down on either side of the argument. Leave Campaign voters, who saw themselves as the insurgent faction, were far more combative and showed this in their willingness to cross the battlefield by arguing on Remain-leaning papers' pages. News posts on social networks like Facebook which were attached to significant newsprint groups experienced far more discussion than the main campaign pages themselves. This is a clear indication that the news media has a significant influence in this regard.

Finally, even if they are not present physically online, through direct media influence the newspapers still set the tone of debate which is eventually disseminated in the news sphere online. As the newspapers begin a train of thought or pick up a story elsewhere, this is built upon by others and the narrative changes in line. Such is the pervasive influence of the UK print media on the debate that even in the relatively free exchange of information that the internet represents, many alternative arguments never cut through. Even within the Remain-leaning press there were a number of articles in which ground was ceded to the arguments of the Leave side particularly with regards to portrayals of immigration in which only its negative impacts were typically portrayed, and which drove significant numbers of people to vote Leave (Goodwin et al 2017).

Therefore, even if younger people may not voraciously read the papers as they may have done in generations past, the influence of the newspaper mass media still had an overall effect on the debates and discourses that went on during the Referendum and the Conservative campaign.

As previously mentioned, the drive towards a hard Brexit began and entered the public consciousness in recent years through the actions of the news media. During the Referendum itself, the newsprint media was primarily sympathetic towards Brexit for the most part as Khabaz found in their 2018 analysis of newspapers during the period. These findings re-emphasised the conclusions found above which was that UK newspapers have been significantly

Eurosceptic in recent years and given the overall influence that these newspapers have on the overall news coverage in the UK, it is highly likely that influence had an impact on the various debates.

At this point it should be noted that with regards to the UK press, although most papers have been significantly Eurosceptic in recent years, the newsprint industry's political party support has been a lot more flexible during this time. As mentioned above, *The Sun*, although its values remain unchanged, notably moved support away from the Labour party back to the Conservatives in 2009 after 12 years of supporting Labour. Given *The Sun's* propensity to view itself as a kingmaker and its unchanging values during this period, it is perhaps little surprise that it eventually changed party allegiance back to what many might consider it's more natural home as a Conservative endorsing paper. As Wilk et al (2013) found during the initial New Labour period, the result of Murdoch owned papers unifying behind the Labour Party lessened the stranglehold that the Conservatives held over most of the press of the UK during this period. In the aftermath of the return of Murdoch's papers to the Conservative fold however, the traditional Conservative majority amongst the national press began to reassert itself once more in the lead up to the 2010 General Election.

However, it is important to note what a key fact is when it comes to voters and political endorsements. As Bayram (2013) showed, although endorsements amongst papers can be important, there is no certainty that these endorsements, even amongst papers renowned for a particular party loyalty, will lead to a majority of readers voting for a paper's particular choice of party. This was evidenced in the 2005 General Election amongst *The Sun's* readership where over half the readers did not follow the paper's choice of party (which may explain its movement towards directly supporting the Conservative Party in the 2010 election). However, it should be noted that even the traditionally conservative readership of *The Daily Telegraph* still saw 30% of its readership who participated in the election voting for the then comparatively centrist Labour Party. This indicates the comparative fickleness in party choice amongst a paper's readership even when that readership is popularly viewed as a homogeneous unit.

Overall therefore, the UK newsprint media's influence and attitudes in the recent past offer us several important things of note to look at. Although statistically

these newspapers may be in decline through simple use of metrics and a collapsing in person readership, if one analyses direct sales, the initial assumptions that this equates to a dying or dead influence on national debate would be a serious error. As evidenced by the grip that the national press still has on television broadcasters, as well as its large online presence which have significant reach, the ability for the press to still influence the debates surrounding issues in the country, as well as the portrayal of significant public figures, is still highly significant. A notable example of this was the infamous bacon sandwich moment associated with Ed Miliband (Murphy 2014) which was first covered in the *London Evening Standard* and which did much to shape the public's perception of Miliband's character and his own reputation in the following 2015 General Election (Algottson 2016) (Gaber 2017). The use of this one photograph (a comparatively innocent moment and in any rational respect one that shouldn't have any significant impact on voting intentions) instead became an infamous moment that seemed to encapsulate the comparative hopelessness that began to be associated with Miliband by many in the right-wing press and likely, along with an effective Conservative messaging campaign, contributed to the defeat Labour suffered. The fact that this caricature became so pronounced from its initial use in newspapers to becoming a "meme" of the General Election is something that should not be ignored.

Summary

Even if the National Press is in decline some things remain clear in the UK. The newspapers in the UK may no longer be conducting the orchestra of public discourse, but they are still the ones providing the sheet music that everyone else uses to begin the origins of most narratives on the television and importantly, they still remain a significant presence in online discourses.

CHAPTER 3

YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOTING PATTERNS

This chapter will explore the recent voting habits of young people, their political attitudes and values and the extent to which they are a homogeneous group of voters.

When exploring the mindset of young Leave and Conservative voters (defined as those who were between the ages of 18-24 at the time of their respective votes), it is crucial to acknowledge and investigate patterns of young people's political preferences and behaviours around the time of the 2017 General Election and the 2016 EU referendum. The youth are generally more left-wing and more likely to be Remainers than their older peers (HM Government 2017). Examining young people's political preferences and behaviour allows us to have a better understanding of the mindset of those who voted Leave during the Brexit referendum and Conservative in the General Election of 2017.

When viewing voting habits in both the EU referendum and the 2017 General Election, it is important to realise that the "Youth Vote" has been in serious decline over the past few decades, not just in the United Kingdom, but also in other European countries (Melo and Stockemer 2014). However, this decline in direct participation at the voting booth has not necessarily been indicative of political apathy as observed by Melo and Stockemer when looking at voting trends in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. What they discovered instead was that it was a result of changing norms and values amongst this section of the population. Notions of civic duty have been theorised to have had a significant impact on voting behaviour in the past, as observed by Knack (1992). As voting often takes place out of a sense of civic duty and is viewed as an effort to comply with those norms, it's reasonable to ask, what happens when the norms for a specific cohort begin to change? When the notion of civic duty is no longer a driving force?

The evidence would seem to indicate that there has been an increase in direct political participation (Dalton 2013), but this has often been coupled with an increased indifference towards mainstream political participation such as with the act of voting. The actor and comedian, Russell Brand's attitude of not voting simply out of a disinterest in mainstream political parties, is a reason

often given by many in the electorate and is a particularly prevalent attitude amongst young voters as Loader et al (2014) discovered in their work “The networked young citizen: social media, political participation and civic engagement” (Loader et al 2014). As a result, political participation amongst younger people already has a very different perspective compared to the more mature electorate. The current vogue in political participation amongst the young focuses on alternative forms of political participation to that of the voting booth. High youth vote participation was not evident in the 2015 General Election where, despite a large volume of political engagement on sites such as Twitter and YouTube with the election campaign, it did not translate into action at the poll booths and the vast majority of young people eligible to vote still failed to do so, or actively chose not to vote (Byrne 2015).

This leads us then to the intriguing fact that when voting took place in the Brexit referendum and the 2017 General Election, young voters went against what had become the norm in their cohort which was not actually voting at all. We were suddenly presented with a new phenomenon in that a significant number of young voters (64%) did participate in the EU referendum. The referendum percentage was a major shift away from the downward trajectory of a declining youth vote. As noted by Becker et al (2017) in their analysis by district, there was a huge disparity between the 2015 General Election when less than half of eligible young voters participated and the 2016 EU Referendum where the percentage of young people voting increased to 64%. Therefore, during the EU referendum we can make a relatively safe assumption that there was a significant upturn in young voters at the booths on this occasion, going against the previous norm and helping to paint the picture as to the type of young voters who took part.

The 2017 General Election’s turnout amongst young voters however, is a slightly murkier situation. A large upturn in young voters was, at first, thought to have been repeated in 2017 due to Labour’s increased performance as well as much anecdotal evidence at the time in the mainstream media (in both the left-wing and right-wing press). At the time of writing, there is conflicting data as to what percentage of young people voted in the 2017 General Election. YouGov (Curtis 2017) and other pollsters have indicated a youth turnout that was significantly higher than in 2015, with numbers approaching or on the same

level as the votes amongst young people in the 2016 EU referendum. It should be noted that this increase in comparison to 2015 does correlate with the increased youth participation seen in the Brexit referendum and would agree with the popular maxim that once a person has voted they will continue to do so (Gerber et al 2003) (Cutts et al 2009). However, there is recent evidence which attempts to counteract this narrative. The recent work of Prosser et al (2018) has challenged the notion that there was a “youthquake” amongst the younger electorate which aided Jeremy Corbyn’s solid performance in the General Election. Their data seems to indicate that amongst young voters, the turnout increase had been minimal at most. Their article “Tremors But No Youthquake – Measuring Changes in the Age and Turnout Gradients at the 2015 and 2017 British General Elections”, elements of which appeared on the BBC, promotes a very different narrative than the popular one of a “youthquake” that arose around the time of the election.

Prosser et al’s 2018 work above raises some significant questions about young voters in the 2017 General Election. Do they remain a significant minority as young voters were in 2015 or do they constitute a majority? In other words, has the norm in the youth voting demographic changed at all? The work by Prosser et al raises several interesting points, but has flaws, particularly in the demographic they have targeted. As noted in the article, there are several flaws in respondent validation. Unfortunately for Prosser et al, these flaws are particularly applicable to university students and others in higher education (who typify many of the transitory issues that are deemed most significant for accurate responder validation) and whom make up a significant number of young people (HM Government 2017). Students often move due to housing contracts ending shortly after June/July time periods and are often registered in more than one place. Due to elections taking place primarily in the May-July period, this can have a significant impact on electoral surveys. These elements are noted in the article to be significant hampers to validating a vote and both could well be at work here. This respondent validation would be less troublesome if it wasn’t for another key aspect of their analysis which was that of sample size.

The total sample size for students aged 18-24 was only 109 people. If the face to face British Electoral Survey was done on the wrong date (for example in a

period when students are going home at the end of the academic year), the numbers could easily be heavily skewed away from the reality of the actual voting situation, particularly in the comparatively mobile population which comprises young people in higher education. Correcting for supposed flaws in the data can have a significant impact on results as well, such as overweighting or underweighting away from the raw numbers. Corrections where no problem exists can cause data to be skewed far further as Damien Lyons Lowe explained on the Daily Politics programme after the pollster Survation became one of the few pollsters to predict the outcome of the 2017 General Election (BBC 2017). These problems combined can call into question the claims of a lack of youthquake in the 2017 election. Not all of these issues are necessarily a reflection of Prosser et al's work, but are in fact deeper problems with the British Electoral Survey itself and its failure, in this author's opinion, to account for the modern transitory nature of much of the youth vote in arriving at its conclusions.

Youth vote participation is therefore complex and may be evidence of a changing norm from what it was before or alternatively, at least for the 2017 General Election, it could be a reversion back to what it was in the past. With regards to reversions to past behaviour, we must also discuss a reversion in political preferences. One of the things that Prosser et al have hit upon, which may in fact be correct, is that young voters had become more closely aligned to the Labour Party in the 2017 Election. This leads to the other important aspect in the discussion of young voters. Whilst the behaviour of young voters (primarily their capacity for turning out and affecting the ballot box) has been covered above, where do these voters' political preferences lie?

Before we look closely at young voters' political preferences, it is important to acknowledge that there is a lot of mistrust by all voters regarding politicians and, as a result, this can guide preferences. Whiteley et al's (2016) investigations of voters from 2000 to 2013 touches on this and the ever growing feeling amongst populations that government is just not trustworthy. The above study is merely the tip of an extensive iceberg of other studies showing a similar effect amongst the UK population. Mistrust in politicians is a problem for a significant number of voters and ways to combat that are often varied. The findings of Klüver and Spoon (2016) are particularly interesting and offer explanations for increases in

mistrust. Large parties are often “issue focused” in a broad way, following voters’ whims to a degree. If a policy or issue is popular then parties tend to follow it. Interestingly, Klüver and Spoon noticed important caveats to this.

Firstly, governing parties are less responsive with regards to enacting policies despite it being the common expectation that they will enact their policies. This observation goes a long way towards explaining why governments grow less popular with time. Whether this is evidence of John Acton’s maxim that “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Acton 1887) or if it is just the realities of governance, this lack of response goes some way to explain the loss of faith in government as promises are unfulfilled and concerns ignored. The second major caveat is that smaller parties are not necessarily more hyper alert to voter issue priorities, but niche parties with a specific area of focus do tend to be very responsive to their voters in that area. This observation offers an explanation for UKIP’s rise in popularity. When it comes to young voters, the above information is crucial as it helps us to see the general state of the electorate and what Governments are not responding to, particularly ignoring issues which are important to young voters. The combination of low turnout amongst young voters and the broad churches the large parties attempt to appeal to, can result in young voter issues being ignored. Young voters are not listened to and their concerns are deprioritised over voter demographics who vote more often, which is why there is a particular emphasis by parties on appeasing the grey vote (Green 2017).

As a result of the focus on other demographics, is it any surprise that the majority of young people look for something different in their political leaders and parties. Young people’s values have often differed from older voters as was noted by Ford and Goodwin (2014). The social liberalism espoused by many young people likely to have gone through higher education is in stark contrast to those of older voters who are less likely to have gone through the higher education system. For these voters the modern world and the youth’s value system is alien and the changes they seek often difficult to comprehend. This goes some way to explain the first of the two votes – mainly that of Brexit. Young voters who participated in the Referendum did so from a very different point to that of many Leave voters. Young Remain voters often supported the ideas of multiculturalism and social freedom which the European Union offered,

while many Leave voters took the opportunity to go against a London elite who differed largely from these voters' norms and values (Ford and Goodwin 2017).

To vote Remain for many young voters was a vote taken out of self interest in charting their way forward. They voted for many reasons such as freedom of movement and more economic or employment opportunities. Many of the young Remain voters were highly educated compared to the majority of Leave voters, who were elderly and with less exposure to higher level education or came from areas where educational attainment is known to be low, with the former more likely to be exposed to the perceived positives of being in the European Union. This has led to many problems amongst the vast majority of younger voters after the referendum, who feel various mixtures of betrayal, anger or desperation, with their only hope often being that at least some of the benefits they perceive as coming from EU membership may be maintained (Dorling 2016).

The grievances that the Referendum has brought about may go some way to explaining the tendency amongst young voters to vote against the Conservatives in 2015. Firstly, it must be acknowledged as mentioned earlier, that there are significant differences in opinion, generation by generation with regards to political allegiance, which is well known and dates back to Mannheim's work on generations (Mannheim 1952). As Tilley (2002) explores in his study of voting habits among demographics from 1964 to 1997, although the prevalence of Conservative voters among young demographics does change and shift, it is often reflective of when such groups were socialised. People who came of voting age in Thatcher's government of the 1980s were more Conservative in their political leanings than generational cohorts who came of voting age after the 1980s.

Interestingly, this is borne out by the election result of 2015. This was an election, which despite much fanfare and suspicion that it would be close, with the potential for a coalition or a minority government, ended with a Conservative majority. The Labour Party's campaign ended in what can only be considered a significant failure, with the Conservatives winning a surprise victory and gaining an outright majority in the House of Commons for the first time since 1992 (Bale and Webb 2015). The narratives of the campaign were not defined by the Labour Party due to its ineffectiveness with regards to its messaging and

branding while the Conservative's media campaign by comparison was clear in its message and media presence (Cushion et al 2018).

Not all the blame for the 2015 General Election defeat can be attributed solely to Labour's poor campaign. As mentioned earlier, youth turnout was very low in this election and, what may be more shocking in comparison to the 2017 election, was that a significant number, approximately 25% of young voters, voted for the Conservative Party, although the majority did vote for Labour (Hawkins et al 2015). Crucially though, the 2015 election was symptomatic of the problem identified earlier. Young voters had seemed engaged at the time and many articles on social media and engagement with young people appeared. This election was not though the revolution amongst the youth that some had thought because the engagement on social media did not translate into physical votes at the booths.

In the immediate aftermath of the election, Fielding (2015), posed the question as to whether Ed Miliband's Labour Party had correctly identified a variety of problems afflicting the country, but had simply failed to put this message effectively across to voters. Hindsight has in part justified those suspicions.

After the 2015 General Election Ed Miliband resigned as party leader due to the Labour party's dismal performance causing a leadership challenge to be initiated. To many people's surprise, a little-known rebellious backbencher with far-left views called Jeremy Corbyn was entered by several MPs to ensure the full spectrum of the party's views was represented. What was even more surprising is that this little-known backbencher then went on to win the leadership election convincingly (Quinn 2016). Jeremy Corbyn's election as party leader was controversial in the media and almost immediately questions were being asked as to how long he would last and whether his election, despite its convincing nature, was truly reflective of the Labour Party due to much of his support coming from new members or registered members who had potentially voted for different parties in the 2015 General Election (Dorey and Denham 2016). The main assertion the mainstream media made was that this result was down to an influx of registered supporters, particularly younger voters, and this tended to be the viewpoint portrayed by the media at that time.

However, on the occasion of Jeremy Corbyn's win, despite media portrayals otherwise, there is surprisingly little evidence with regard to Corbyn's rise in the Labour Party being down to an influx of young members. As the data from parliamentary estimates show (Kenn and Audickas 2015), membership of the Labour Party remains at quite a low rate with the demographic of young members. The difference between the views and support of the youngest Labour Party members to the oldest was present but not nearly as high as the rates that had been implied by media sources of the "common knowledge" (Bale et al 2016). The truth is that the voters in the Labour Party leadership contest, from its youngest members to its oldest members, simply found what they wanted in Jeremy Corbyn.

However, this does not dismiss the fact that Jeremy Corbyn was a popular figure amongst some groups of younger people. The rise of the group "Momentum" is a significant argument in Mr Corbyn's favour vis a vis connecting with young potential voters. Momentum's demographics include a significant number of young voters according to their own statistics (Momentum 2016). It should be noted however, that Momentum's youth wing was disbanded in early 2018 so exact numbers are difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, what can be observed before the 2017 election, is that young people had been substantially disengaged politically in the previous 2015 election and of those number who did vote, few were members of a political party. A significant number voted Conservative despite less Conservative options, such as Labour, being vastly more popular.

Information on the main election statistics though can only show us so much. To gain a better understanding of young voters and why they vote the way they do, we need to assess what key social values young voters hold divorced from political labels. Unfortunately, recent data on this point is harder to come by. The British Social Attitudes Survey (NatCen 2017) whilst useful in explaining where the country is as a whole, is less useful in providing us with a detailed picture of the opinion of younger voters. Fortunately, some relatively recent data is available in the form of the Government Survey on the Social Attitudes of Young People, in this case Generation Y [born in the period 1980 to the late 1990s and commonly termed these days "millennials"] (HM Government 2014). Much of the survey makes unsurprising reading. Attitudes amongst the youth

are significantly more socially liberal than the UK majority. In line with the referendum result, 25% of young people would vote to leave the European Union. Only a few points brought major surprises. At the time of the survey, stronger support for the privatisation of public utilities was observed amongst those aged 18-24. Older generations were less likely to show strong support for this viewpoint. In addition, whilst support for democracy is strong, a significant minority (25%) believes it is bad. Other attitudes related to democracy reveal a rather pessimistic view on government's impact on the economy (50% think it is bad) and two thirds believe democracies are indecisive.

This, in many ways, contrasts with what might have been expected if young people were as enamoured with the Labour Party and Corbyn's values as might first be suspected. Contrarily however, such attitudes may line up with belief in the European Union's guiding influence, especially as trust in the UK's domestic democracy has taken such a sharp decline amongst young people as was observed in the most recent government audit of attitudes (Hansard Society 2018) That the young may not be as enamoured of Corbyn as might first be expected is reflected in Corbyn's re-election statistics as Labour party leader in 2016 in which support for Owen Smith, who was widely seen as on Corbyn's right, had higher support amongst those aged 18-24 than Corbyn (a 10% difference 55% compared to 45% for Corbyn) Dorey and Denham (2016). It would be difficult to know whether this was due to stronger Remain sentiment which Smith espoused in contrast to Corbyn's stance on Brexit. As a result, whilst some broad conclusions may be drawn on young people's political preferences, at this point in time it is impossible to make any more specific comments, especially as survey data relevant to this issue is sparse, and even sparser still is survey data relevant to the populations studied in this project. It is not yet known what effect Brexit may have had on opinions on generational divides, or if further developments since the 2014 survey have changed attitudes significantly. At this current time, whilst newspapers, polls and other forms of media can allow us to sketch what attitudes young people tend towards, an accurate portrait may be impossible with the current data available after Brexit and the 2017 General Election.

This thesis sheds new light on the minority of young voters who voted Leave and those who voted for the Conservatives in the 2017 General Election.

These young voters are often overlooked in broad brushed studies of youth voting and participation. We need to understand what young people are passionate about, investigate those values away from strict political party identities, and see if there is a correlation between media's perception of what Brexit and Conservative voters believe in versus what the reality is amongst the overall youth population. We know that the media tends to homogenise Leavers and Conservative voters and in doing so they (the media) tend to overlook youth voters who voted Leave and Conservative. They fail to consider that youth voters who vote along these lines might actually be different from their elders. This is dangerously facile, but it provides the motivation to analyse the impact of the media on those "wayward young voters".

Young people's attitudes and behaviours politically, are hard to pin down. The broad brushstrokes which we can use regarding young potential voters tell us that they may not be as homogenous as the media would have us believe nor may they be as politically ambivalent about voting (well for the foreseeable future at least). As a result, voters who go against the broad stereotype of young voters in voting Conservative in 2017 or Brexit in 2016 may not be homogenous either.

In the next chapter I reveal my methodology for explaining young research participants' views and its relationship to media portrayals. Thus, it draws together the content of Chapters 2 and 3.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will set out the details of the methodology used in this thesis as well as exploring the reasons why this methodology was used in the first place.

In looking at the context of political media portrayal and especially students' resonance with it, we must first find different ways to perform older tasks.

Students as a group pose some particular challenges to researchers, especially on issues such as Referenda and Elections. Students who voted Conservative or Brexit are a distinct minority amongst others of their age group. Amongst young people generally they were already a minority, being close to 27% of the total vote for the demographic aged 18 to 24. This percentage was repeated for both the Brexit and Conservative vote using the Ipsos Mori Estimates after both the Referendum and the 2017 General Election. Discussions on the intricate details of the Youth vote are discussed in the preceding chapters. What complicates matters further for research into this specific issue are the strong correlations with young voters' levels of education which indicates an increased propensity towards voting Remain being present amongst the country's university youth population in the case of the Referendum. Whilst the presence of other political parties and regional politics may complicate this matter further in the 2017 General Elections, evidence by You Gov (2017) indicates that there may be at least a tentative link here as well towards voting Conservative. This can create an uncomfortable atmosphere for those of differing political views to the norm. As has been noted in various media outlets in the period since the Referendum and even prior to that, in the 2015 General Election, students who go against the grain are likely to be judged by their peers and be found wanting. The common attitude expressed towards young Brexiters can sometimes verge on the hostile in some circles and on some campuses, as has been noticed by a variety of anecdotal articles and personal experiences in various aspects of the press such as that shown in interviews by BBC journalist Sophia Bettiza at the University of Leicester on 2nd November 2017 (Bettiza 2017).

Methodologically, this poses a significant problem. Quantitative research can often result in stories going unnoticed and especially those stories of minorities within larger groups, such as Brexit voters within the student population or those

who voted for the Conservatives. As a result, purely quantitative methods are inadequate in gathering this information as individual voices offering a different viewpoint to the mainstream can very easily get lost. It is important to note that this does not dismiss the use of these methods in their entirety but stresses their lack of utility for studying a rare population. These problems will be revisited later in this chapter.

Several of the more popular qualitative methods also encounter some difficulties with this issue. Whilst the opportunity to have one's voice heard in an unstructured interview or a focus group is often appealing with a salient political issue, there can be a natural reticence when interacting with researchers. A nervousness by participants that the researcher may have deeper motives behind the research questions is understandable and highly likely to result in responses possibly being tailored due to these concerns and thus a major problem is encountered. This issue, amongst others, will also be discussed later in the chapter.

In light of these issues, some different approaches, both new (methods) and (those which may be) older but more neglected methods, have been sought and utilised to form a "mixed methods" approach which this researcher believes offers a higher chance of successfully recording participants' views in tandem with the media's coverage of these events and expectations of what those views are likely to be.

Discourse Network Analysis

The first step in this approach has been the use of "Discourse Network Analysis". With events as significant as General/Presidential elections and Referenda, there is almost always a large amount of media focus in the domestic press. This is even the case with elections where the outcome is perceived as likely to go with one party or result over another. These discourses can range from broad discourses on candidate suitability painted in simple terms, such as Corbyn as a socialist or May as robotic, to the more nuanced, such as voters who feel left behind and concerns about the status quo and the established order.

It was crucial to utilise discourse network analysis in this research due to the nature of the debates surrounding Brexit and the Referendum that occurred in

the newspapers at this time. A look at the discourses that were formed in the press during the relevant campaign periods was the only way to obtain statements that might aid in determining the remaining clout that the press possessed. If the discourses were not analysed sufficiently and only “controversial” or “eye catching” statements were extracted for use in the Q-sort section of the research for maximum impact, the result would be a skewed study attempting to push a certain agenda without proper acknowledgement of what had truly occurred in the relevant discourses.

Discourse is a difficult subject to tackle because even the word itself is hard to define in political research. As Fairclough said in 1992 “Discourse is a difficult concept, largely because there are so many conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated from various theoretical and disciplinary Standpoints.” (Fairclough 1992). Fairclough is not wrong. A definition of discourse in political research is almost as hard to define as a definition of what politics is as it means many different things to different schools of thought. With the complications that discourse poses, it should be no surprise that its analysis has spawned many specific ideologies and schools. To a certain degree Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (which collectively came together as a peer group in the early 1990s, with Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak (Wodak 2001)) is of some importance in this dissertation. Dealing as it does with discourse analysis in a form that focuses not just on language but language in context as Wodak puts it “CDA studies not a linguistic unit per se but rather social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multi/inter/transdisciplinary and multimethodological approach.” (Wodak 2013). This is an important distinction to make and it is this key difference from other schools that enables it to be of some benefit in understanding the analysis in this piece of research as it further builds from the initial works of those such as Foucault (Foucault 2013) who was amongst the first to develop Discourse Analysis in a way more relevant to political research.

The key aspect of CDA which is of importance to this research is primarily how CDA views discourse. It is the description of discourse by those researchers in the field of CDA that contains the most accurate definition of discourse in terms of how it is viewed by this study and which is best summarised by Fairclough and Wodak in their 1997 article on the subject:

“CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of ‘social practice’. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people.” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 258)

This definition provides a crucial bridge into the other aspect of analysing this discourse which is the idea of Discourse coalitions. Maarten Hajer’s work is extremely helpful in analysing how the media functions in forming and shaping discourse. As Hajer says “A Discourse coalition is thus the ensemble of a set of story lines, the actors that utter these story lines and the practices that confirm to these story lines, all organized around a discourse.” (Hajer 1993). In the context of discourses around the Brexit Referendum and the 2017 General Election it is one of the more effective ways of viewing both discourses. In both cases (as the latter part of this study will show) there were singular focuses in both the Brexit Referendum and the 2017 General Election. With Brexit the focus was on the benefits/costs of leaving the European Union and thus relevant narratives formed around the discourse in the media. With the General Election the answer was more complex but eventually boiled down to the question of which potential government was more suited to elected office. All other issues discussed revolved around that key point. Discourse coalitions are explored within this thesis to the extent that the key actors are identified and related to the key storylines.

To analyse the relevant discourses in this research article, the software Discourse Network Analyser (DNA) has been used (Leifeld 2013). This software

enables the cataloguing of various news articles which in turn provides a broad base so the researcher can see various links between actors through statements the author highlighted in the text. These statements can be tagged and sorted into various categories allowing for a broad number of actors and organizations and their various opinions to be categorised and a large web of interconnecting ideas to be formed allowing a visual representation of the discourse coalitions discussed above to be seen.

Discourse Network Analyser was an invaluable resource in this case. It cannot be emphasized enough the difficulties that can occur in attempting to obtain a broad idea of relevant media coverage and then adequately being able to take out the most relevant points in each article. The use of Discourse Network Analyser to analysis discourse networks in this case proved to be of incalculable value.

The discourses studied here of Brexit and the 2017 General Election were highly complex. The sheer scale of media coverage on the issue was significant in both cases. However, for the purposes of analysing this discourse, an attempt was made to go for quality of coverage as opposed to quantity. Therefore, elements of both random sampling and more targeted sampling of articles were used. It was felt that using this approach would produce the most accurate picture of what happened during these events. Where possible, one article which related to the discourse from each day in the 31-day period in the run up to the Referendum and the 2017 General Election was taken from six to seven newspapers with the highest UK readership base (see Table 4.1). As an example, for the Referendum on the European Union, articles were taken each day from the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and *The Independent* or *I* (The *I* being the *Independent's* shorter sister paper). Where possible, articles from *The Sun* were also included on days when such relevant articles appeared (though this was far less frequent for Brexit than the others). Analysis of this nature was repeated for the 2017 General Election with *The Sun's* coverage being utilised more often during this period.

Newspaper Titles	Daily Express	Daily Mail	The Times	The Daily Telegraph	The Guardian	The Sun
Number of Brexit Articles extracted during run up to the EU Referendum	31	31	31	31	31	10
Number of General Election 2017 Articles extracted in the run up to the Election	31	31	31	31	31	31

Table 4.1 Number of Articles utilised in Discourse Network Analysis

In both cases, the above six papers were analysed with an article a day relating to the topic chosen by “targeted gathering” of sample articles and eliminating those which were not relevant to the discussion. For example, articles that mentioned the Referendum only were included and those that had it as a comparison to how the French election was going at the time were excluded. This resulted in a winnowing of articles some days to those which were most relevant to the discussion (in this case meaning an exclusion of articles which contained key words but were not relevant to the debates at hand). At this point RNG (Random Number Generator) was used on the remaining articles to determine which one to use. This ensured a measure of continuity and, as a result of the random nature of the sample, a wide spectrum of beliefs was present in both cases. In the United Kingdom for example, the *Daily Express* stands far to the right of the political spectrum, in contrast to the *Independent* which often veers far more towards the left of the political spectrum, with various other papers in between, so a broad picture of narratives of the time can be seen. All newspapers used were amongst those with the highest circulation in their respective communities or had significant elements that made them of interest to the study. Broadsheets, middle market tabloids and red tops were all utilized. It should be noted that the *Daily Mirror* was not utilised as one of the papers in the study. This was a conscious decision as the focus was on the Leave vote and the Conservative leaning press plus the Remain leaning papers

which tend to be read by a student cohort (*The Guardian* and *The Independent* being far more common in a campus setting than the *Daily Mirror*).

From the large number of statements generated (within each broad discourse analysed there were over 150 statements), the statements were further whittled down by independent analysis to enable a broad spectrum of representation of the discourse for the use of Q-Sort methodology as well as providing an overview of the discourse itself.

Q-Sort methodology typically requires the production of a set of statements, images, words or phrases based around the topic in question (although it should be noted that in some research it can use items as bizarre as odours, which the methods creator William Stephenson in one of his early articles used as an example of what the methodology could be used to measure (Stephenson 1936)). A set is effectively a group of information that can be manipulated and utilised to be sorted by the research participant in order of agreement to disagreement. This set (which is the Q-Sort), when it is of the conventional type, is then given to the participant to arrange on a grid with various columns and rows arranged in a reverse pyramid structure. The structure may vary but provides two points (typically single cells but occasionally multiple cells) on either side of either strong agreement (typically in a value of positive integers) or strong disagreement (typically represented by negative integers). The numbering of this reverse pyramid structure can often include a 0 but unlike other methods or questionnaires, it is not necessarily the case that the 0 represents a lack of agreement or disagreement but rather is a number on the sliding scale. Crucially, there is the option to have no column for a lack of agreement or disagreement. Instead, the participant who is asked to complete the Q-Sort must assign a real value to each of the words or statements seen thereby allowing a more complete analysis of the research question or hypothesis involved. The completion by participants of the Q-Sort on the pyramid represents the data that is then used and from which trends and conclusions can be drawn.

Q-Sort methodology is a method type that is seldom seen in political research compared to other methodological tools, a trend noted and bemoaned by Watts and Stenner (2012) as “unfortunate” given the useful data which it produces. It is not difficult to ascertain why it has been less popular or as well-known as

other methodological tools because at first glance, Q-Sort methodology looks to be significantly more complex, at least for the researcher. The method is not easy to utilize initially which may explain why Stephenson, the method's creator, never found a large audience for its use during his time as an academic in the United Kingdom (Watts and Stenner 2012:18-19). Much of the development in factor analysis was instead led by Cyril Burt whose technique, whilst sharing many similarities with Stephenson's, has some fundamental disagreements in its aims and ultimately its results, as can be seen in a joint article by the two psychologists near the start of their academic careers and shortly after they developed their respective methods (Burt and Stephenson 1939). The approach postulated by Burt offers little use to political researchers, but Stephenson's method offers far more. This is because Burt's method did not develop much beyond his precursor's work in terms of its aim, whilst Stephenson's offered up a range of new possibilities by enabling its use beyond the field of Psychology.

The Q-Sort methodology developed by Stephenson and which was further developed by Block (2008) and Brown (1980) offers a unique perspective on a participant's opinion of a subject. For each participant who completes a Q-Sort a unique overview of that participant's views on that subject is created provided the statements within a Q-Sort allow for this.

This is what makes the method one of crucial importance in this research. In an interview or focus group situation we can find shyness and leading questions. This can lead on occasion to a lack of nuance. The question "Do you agree with the *Daily Mail's* coverage of Brexit?" for example is a broad question to answer for a research participant. They may not have read the papers at the time or may have a bias against a particular paper. Fortunately, this is not the case with Q-Sort methodology. On these occasions an inherent bias towards a newspaper or a political figure may be muted as a quote or paper statement become part of the overall Q-Sort. This provides an excellent view of what someone's true feelings towards a discourse can be as opposed to what they might think if directly questioned.

The setting up of a Q-Sort is a time intensive process which is dependent on numerous factors to which I myself can attest to as well as the various researchers who are associated with or have explored the utilization of this method. Curt (1994: p.128-9) opined that the setting up of a Q-Sort is likely to

be the bulk of the researcher's time, potentially taking many weeks or months, whilst Brown (1980: p.186) came to the conclusion that the setting up of a Q-Sort was less of a science and more of an art. In following in the footsteps of these researchers by taking on the Q-Sort challenge, I can opine that this is indeed the case. Attempts to rationalise a Q-Sort through random chance and science would be ill advised. As Burt said the process of setting up a Q-Sort is close to an art form. A few misplaced statements on a researcher's behalf that don't fit the tone or the subject can lead to confusion amongst participants and the researcher. On the other hand, if a researcher manages to "Paint" a Q-Sort correctly, one can find invaluable knowledge and opinions which would otherwise be impossible to gather without extensive interviews and foreknowledge on a particular idea or factor. This would be an almost impossible task akin to asking to look for one particular needle with a minor imperfection in a stack full of needles. In this case one or more of these needles may be there but it would be an impossible task to find them. It is only with the large spectrum of opinions that a Q-Sort allows to be expressed and the independent actions of participants can these useful pieces of data be found.

The ability of the participant to paint their opinions in this way is one of the primary advantages of a Q-Sort. Structured interviews and unstructured interviews at first seem to allow for painting in a similar way. However, this is not quite the case. At every point during an interview a participant has the risk of being guided by the researcher. No matter how much freedom a participant may have, they are limited by numerous factors beyond their control such as the general focus of the questions or the influencer effect. While a Q-Sort is limited by the initial statements and the design of the array itself, beyond that the participant is free in how they distribute data. Rather than attempting to have to give one's own views of the subject, the participant is free to choose and array the information in whatever ranking they like. The researcher themselves takes a back foot in a way they cannot in an interview or focus group situation. With a Q-Sort the research stands outside of the situation (Watts and Stenner 2012, p84-85). Without the need for the interviewer to guide or lead the participant, a participant's choices are their own and the researcher may only need to be involved to clarify the odd question.

The above are the major advantages of using Q-Sort Methodology and they are numerous and significant. There are, however, some drawbacks to the method, which may explain its comparative lack of use. Whilst flexible within the parameters of the Q-Sort, the opinions and data that a participant can give is limited to what the Q-Sort manages to convey and for practical purposes not all of the information on a discourse can make it into the final Q-Sort. This is a problem which an unstructured interview or a more open discussion in a focus group may be able to solve. In addition, a Q-Sort can suffer from the same problem that focus groups and interviews experience, in that the amount of time a participant takes over it can be significant, even if the flexibility of the Q-Sort allows for this to be significantly less likely to be a problem. Finally, the final analysis of the results of the Q-Sort requires a significant investment of time and at least a rudimentary understanding of factor rotation and extraction (as will be explored in further detail later in this chapter). Perhaps more than anything, this is the aspect of Q-Sort methodology that is the most challenging to grasp for the layman. It is far more difficult to understand a piece of research utilising Q-Sort methodology than that which utilises focus groups and interviews both of which are easier to comprehend as they require far less background knowledge on other disciplines which Q-Sort methodology relies upon. Q-Sort methodology is an incredibly useful tool for the researcher but does pose a risk for any researcher to get the work recognised outside an academic discipline due to its problem in translating the results and methodology into a form easier to understand for the wider public. The methodology seems simple enough to initially grasp but can take some time to fully understand without a sufficient background in factor analysis and factor extraction methodology.

Despite these issues there is one final advantage to discuss and that is the significant benefit the nature of Q-Sort methodology allows for, mainly that the subjective nature of completing a Q-Sort allows for comparisons of data that can be highly valid but also quantifiable and measurable. The data obtained from a group of participants has the advantage of being valid but quantifiable with the potential for patterns in the data to be identified and broader conclusions to be drawn. It should be noted that this does not mean that such conclusions are generalizable, but the sample size can provide a snapshot of what potential opinions amongst these groups could be. This allows some

potential conclusions to be drawn on issues that the fragmentary nature of focus groups and interviews may not be able to grasp.

As previously discussed, the scope with which Q-Sort methodology allows issues to be discussed should not be understated. It allows a huge concentration of material to be gathered and explored in a short amount of time by a participant. The detailed analysis of a discourse which allowed several dozen statements to be picked may lack fine detail, but it can provide a broad outline of how a discourse went during an election or referendum. Although daunting in many ways for the researcher due to the time investment in creating it, for the participant it is far simpler and as mentioned earlier, levels of agreement and disagreement can be easily measured and organized. In this way the accuracy of media coverage in representing young voters' beliefs was easily documented and sorted with a level of detail that is unlikely to be reached otherwise. The advantages of using Q-Sort were clear as the study was undertaken. Time wise, whilst the completion of the base Q-Sort was time consuming, it was rectified by the fact that the time taken to analyse the data afterwards was significantly reduced. A sample of 15 individual interviews or 3 focus groups of five people takes far more time to analyse than 15 Q-Sorts on the same topic which can be input and analysed in a fraction of the time. In addition, Q-Sorts allow a great deal of flexibility that is not shared by focus groups and which is tenuous in interviews. A Q-Sort completion took far less time and was arranged around the schedule of potential participants compared to focus groups which require a consensus among individual members of the group.

For these reasons, Q-Sort methodology fits perfectly into the overall analysis and aims of the study. In combination with the advantages given by the discourse network analysis, a broad picture of the media coverage was given to participants whilst allowing them to make their own decisions and judgements on the issue.

The combination of the methods therefore was a simple one. Discourse network analysis allows the gathering of a large amount of data providing a broad overview of the media discourse and crucially allows the gathering and sorting of statements that can be used in Q-Sorts. Due to the high number of articles and the fact that many articles have several statements that are of use in a Q-

Sort, the broad picture of the relevant discourse was constructed and given to the participant. Balance was achieved by ensuring that all papers were significantly represented within Q-Sorts so that a broad spectrum of the debate was gathered. This included statements that were both positive and negative about various actors with an avoidance of statements that were overtly neutral or too technical. These measures ensured a Q-Sort which would be easier to sort for participants and allowed for more pertinent information to be gathered in line with the research aims.

Q-Sort methodology in this case provided a large amount of data. However, clarification and questions were needed to find out the broader attitudes of the various participants which a Q-Sort on its own would simply be unable to extract. For this purpose, a short qualitative questionnaire was used that allowed the final details to be specified by a participant. Broad questions that have little value on their own but can be answered simply with a participant's relevant Q-Sort provided a fantastic insight into their true thoughts. Even when the participant's questionnaire disagrees with how they administered their Q-Sort, these occasions still provided interesting data as to why the participant's questionnaire contradicts with the information which they themselves have sorted. In the case of this research, the painting that was each Q-Sort was clarified by the questionnaires they then undertook. An artist's explanation of their work in a manner of speaking.

However, it must be stated that whilst taking a holistic view of each individual Q-Sort, it is intriguing to find underlying patterns. Thus, further specifications were needed. In this case it came in the form of Factor Analysis and Varimax Rotation.

Factor Analysis allows for particular view-points to be classified. Varimax Rotation helps to find parsimonious solutions to the factor analysis. For more on the processes and science behind these methods see Harman (1976) and Kline (2014), who both provide a broad overview of the subject of factor analysis. See Abdi (2003) for an explanation of the use of various methods of factor rotation, in which the various types of factor rotation are laid out and concisely explained.

For the purposes of this research, the necessary data from the Q-Sorts was input into an excel spreadsheet and then analysed by Ken-Q software for the

initial scree plot and data before undergoing Varimax rotation. This process allowed for the ultimate extraction of factors relevant to both the Brexit Q-Sorts and 2017 General Election Q-Sorts allowing for analysis of these factors and some individual Q-Sorts to see the general shape of the study.

Whilst the combined use of the above research methodologies are designed to address the project's research questions, it is worth examining if that did indeed occur.

The DNA analysis allowed me to identify and summarise the key discourses associated with the Brexit Referendum and 2017 General Election, resulting in a clear mapping of media portrayals of both sides of these debates. It also facilitated my selection of the statements for the Q-Sorts which were chosen because they represented that discourse. Together with the Q-Sort, the DNA enabled me to address whether "Media portrayals of sides of these debates exaggerate political conflict", (RQ1). The follow-up questionnaire was designed to further explore that same question as to whether "Media portrayals of sides of these debates exaggerate political conflict" as well ascertaining to "what extent the research participants treated media opinion as truth", (RQ3). The Q-Sort results allowed a nuanced understanding of viewpoints to be developed, facilitating an answer to the question of whether "young Leave and Conservative Party General Election voters are more nuanced in their political positions and values than the media portrayals imply", (RQ2).

Below is a detailed description of what fully occurred in the research process:

The initial discourse network analysis undertaken took place as discussed earlier in the chapter.

For the hypotheses related to Brexit, 15 Brexit voters were sought out in and around the Penryn Campus area. This number provides a relatively substantial pool for comparison. The students in question here are all from the same university campus thus having a similar level of homogeneity in that they are all involved in Higher Education and tend to be exposed to similar levels of social media and newsprint media. More specifically though, in the case of the Penryn campus, the county of Cornwall as a whole is primarily a Brexit voting part of the UK (although the Truro and Falmouth constituency would have been closely Remain) and also possesses Conservative members of parliament. This meant

that those young student voters who leaned towards voting Leave were in an area where opinions and other influences related to Leave voter issues had a higher chance of being salient in contrast to the influences which Leave leaning young voters would experience in a campus within a Remain stronghold such as those campuses based in London which voted overwhelmingly in favour of Remain. Q-Sorts were then administered to the 15 participants separately using statements gathered from the news media through discourse network analysis concerning Brexit prior to the vote (in the preceding month). As previously mentioned, the spread of newspapers is vast, covering the entire political spectrum with representatives of both the Right and Left of the press as well as both the “mid-market” press and the “quality press”. Papers involved were those with:

1. A high national print circulation
2. A high national online readership.
3. Discretionary judgement of the researcher.

This allowed for a broad coverage with a variety of opinions for the Q-Sort.

The media statements gathered from discourse network analysis were then extensively sorted to generate a Q-Sort with a sample of 48 statements.

Working with two senior researchers, I was able to whittle down the statements to a set that was valid in its representation of the debates in the media. This allowed for a large spread of potential options but not a glut that was too difficult to categorise for participants, and it also allowed for both the right of the press and the left of the press to be represented. Participants were then asked to categorise the statements on a flat matrix of 48 places allowing for a wider spread from -5 to +5. After this, participants were given a short standard questionnaire asking specific questions with regards to the media portrayal of Brexit as well as the future of Leave as a political ideal issue (See Appendix 7 for questionnaire). The results were then gathered and subjected to Ken-Q software run factor analysis whereupon five factors were extracted overall of which 4 were of use being in or around the standard cut-off point of 1. At this point Factors 1,2,3 and 5 were subjected to Varimax rotation in which the final conclusions of the data gathered were then drawn.

This process was then continued in a similar way with 15 Conservative voters with the same methods used for Q-Sort collection. The results were then gathered and subjected as the Brexit data was to Ken-Q software run factor analysis, with the exception that only 3 factors were extracted and of these 3 all underwent Varimax rotation.

At this point the data then underwent a written analysis with reference to particular questionnaire responses (see Appendix 11 for questionnaire) to result in the final analysis which was then discussed with reference to the hypotheses.

Ethical Approval

Ethics approval for this project was sought and received by the University of Exeter Ethics Committee.

Informed Consent was sought before the Q-Sorts and was received by all participants who were made aware of their ability to leave the Q-Sort and the research at any point in time.

Confidentiality and general anonymity was ensured through the use of a letter and numbering system to protect participants' identities. This system was randomised and was not tied in any way to a participant's exact age (with the exception that participants were not over age 27 for those who took part in the Referendum Q-Sorts and not over age 26 for the General Election Q-Sorts to ensure they fell within the scope of having been in the age group between 18-24 during the Referendum or Election and hence could be classified as a "young" voter), gender or the Course they were undergoing at the time they participated in the Q-Sort as this was all information deemed irrelevant to the purposes of the study.

Data protection was undertaken in line with General Data Protection Regulations set out in EU law to ensure that protection for participants was absolute.

For further information including the information sheet used and consent form to be signed, see Appendix 1.

CHAPTER 5

DISCOURSE NETWORK ANALYSIS

In exploring the Brexit Referendum and the General Election of 2017, an analysis of the newspaper discourses in the run up to the final day of voting is essential. Whatever post-referendum news media may say and assume about the relevant discourses, the only way to truly determine what was discussed in those discourses necessitates an actual investigation into those sources. As several of the major television news networks in the United Kingdom are obliged to be at least nominally unpartisan, the best reflection on partisan discourse lies with the newspaper media. As such, what follows is an analysis of over 200 statements for both the Brexit and General Election debates, taken from over 150 articles in each case, during the four-week period preceding the final voting deadline. This has been analysed through Discourse Network Analyser (Leifield 2013) and visual representations have been produced using NetDraw (a program for drawing social networks). This analysis has been examined and illustrated throughout the rest of this chapter.

Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) of the 2016 Brexit discourse in newspapers

Media reporting on Brexit can be viewed as far more complicated than might first be presumed. Reporting on Brexit varied significantly across the newspapers covered. The papers reviewed were *The Sun*, *The Independent*/*I*, *The Guardian*/*Observer*, *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*. These papers represent a variety of views from across the spectrum including the broadsheet press papers of both the left and the right and papers aligned with both Brexit and Remain. Therefore, the discourses contain a variety of papers and positions with varying levels of agreement and disagreement with different discourses.

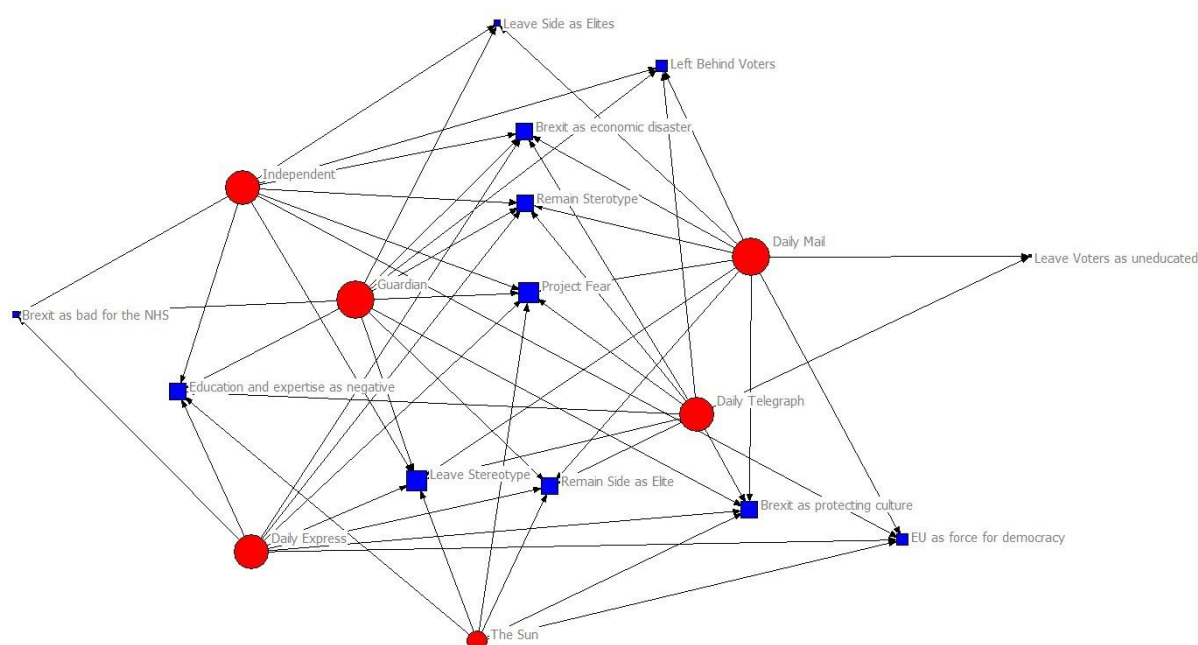


Figure 5.1. Person/Category Brexit Discourse agreement

In DNA, circles represent newspapers and squares represent aspects of the discourse. An articulation of key statements of the discourse used in the Q-Sorts is explored in the next chapter (a visualisation of the overall codings of the first two figures of this chapter is available in Appendix 2 Table 5.1). Initial explorations of the newspapers and different discourse prevalence may offer surprising results at first with regards to Brexit. Figure 5.1 clearly illustrates that discourses did not exist entirely in a vacuum. Discourse points which one would

not expect to appear in Leave-leaning media in agreement with prominent discourses were in fact reported in the Leave-leaning press. Ideas such as Brexit as an “Economic Disaster” for Remain, or, “Education and Expertise as a Negative” for Leave were found, not only in their predictive papers, but also in the papers of their opposites. As can be seen from the diagram, both *The Independent* and *The Guardian* reported on “Education and Expertise as Negative” as well as the Leave-leaning press. All newspapers, other than *The Sun*, reported on Brexit as an “Economic Disaster”. It should be noted here, however, that *The Sun*’s presence is smaller than the other papers featured. This is due to numerous factors including the dearth of results present when researching using the term Referendum and the quality of *The Sun* paper’s reporting style, which did not favour the lengthier articles which produced many statements. Nevertheless, even the small number of statements which *The Sun* did provide included statements showing the EU as a force for democracy which again was an unexpected result when considering the nature of the paper’s coverage towards the European Union.

These surprises do not exist solely in these papers’ coverage of agreements with regards to Brexit discourses. They are also present in the nature of disagreements within certain narratives as can be observed in Figure 5.2 below.

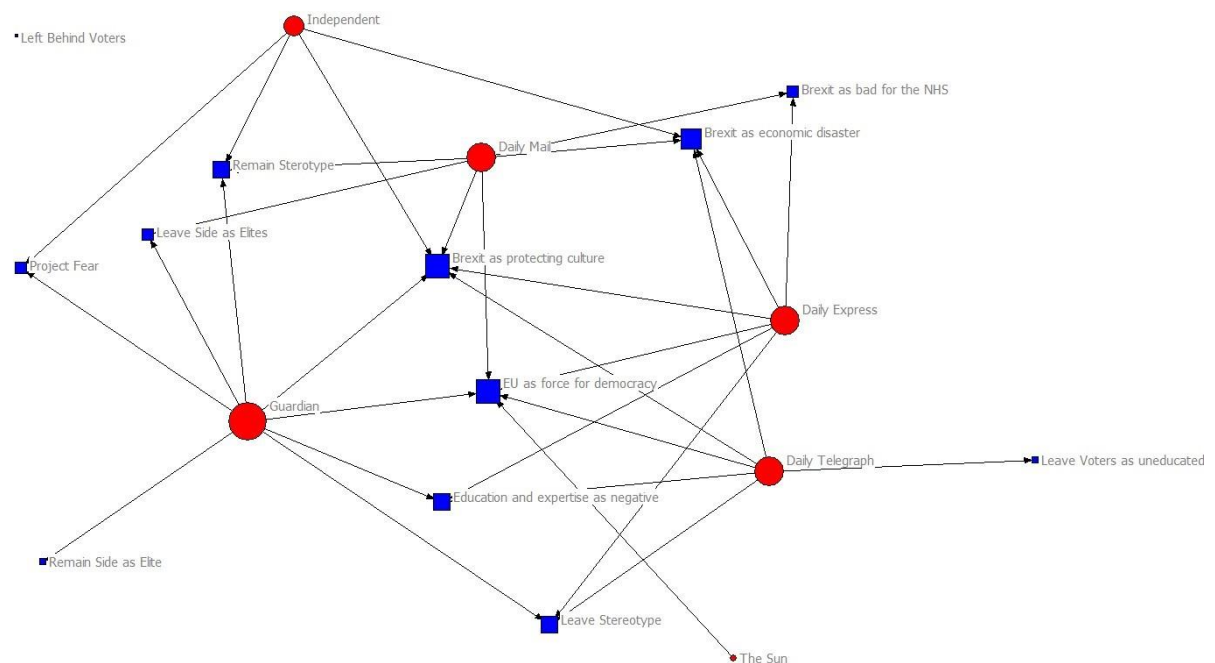


Figure 5.2 Person/Category Brexit Discourse disagreement

Again, *The Sun's* comparatively small sample size (numbering 10 articles - see previous chapter) and simplicity of coverage is immediately obvious compared to the other papers. However, all papers are smaller in node size than in the agreement category. As might be expected, disagreements to narratives are less commonly reported than agreements to narratives. However, it must be noted that once again certain narratives which one would expect newspapers to agree with rather than disagree with, or disagree rather than agree with, occur once again. The notion of the Leave side as 'elite' is disagreed with on at least one occasion by *The Guardian*, as is the notion of 'Brexit protecting culture' which would be expected to have a level of agreement rather than three of the four Brexit papers disagreeing with the statement on at least one occasion. What this shows us is important. Both agreements and disagreements with the dominant Remain or Leave side narratives often show evidence of being reported in papers where one would expect less nuance by editorial lines. Whilst this is not true of all narratives (for example, Remain stereotypes being disagreed with are only shown on one occasion as being opposed by a Leave-leaning paper) the fact that it is true on at least some occasions indicates that the narratives may not be as black and white or secluded as ideas of partisan press or stereotypes might first presume.

Crucially, it is important to note that whilst newspapers often have a significant bias, Figures 1 and 2 only show half the story of the Brexit discourse. Importantly, there are more factors at work than just the papers themselves as newspapers also report on the actors involved within news articles. This means that initial perceptions may at first be misleading with regards to Brexit discourses.

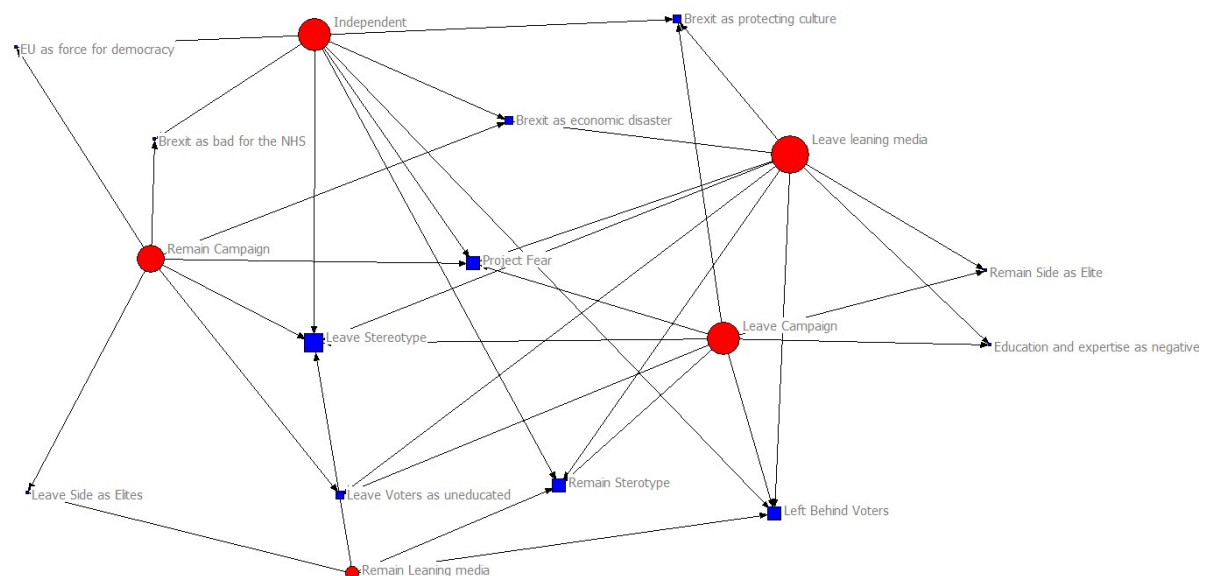


Figure 5.3 Organisations/Categories Brexit Discourse agreement

Different actors/organisations within newspaper coverage give us a more intimate look at how discourses may have played out within the papers themselves (for a visualisation of the codings for Figures 5.3 and 5.4 see Appendix 2 Table 5.2). As an example, whilst the Remain-leaning *The Independent* and *The Guardian* may have reported on many of the different categories that made up the discourse, the detail of what happened within those papers may be more significant. In the case of *The Guardian* in one example (Gayle 2016), the following is seen “Grayling, a prominent voice in the campaign to leave the EU, also said that terrorists would pose as refugees to enter the bloc, posing a potential threat to Britain’s national security”. This statement was categorised as being from *The Guardian* but the organisation/actor involved was part of the Leave campaign.

This points to a crucial aspect in discussing these cases. The Leave campaign, The Remain campaign and Independents were all significant actors in this discourse. As a result, all were reported on in the papers regardless of whether the papers agreed in an editorial way with what was being said. Often statements by the Leave campaign or the Remain campaign were then criticised within the papers reporting on them, who either tacitly or out-rightly supported either side of the debate. Amongst the newspapers covered there

was a variety of leaning towards one side or the other, but none of the newspapers involved were neutral in their coverage and a strong leaning was easy to detect in most articles.

However, what is interesting to note is that whilst many of the agreements with regards to the newspapers involved can be explained away by the actions of various campaign actors, on several occasions there were examples which cannot be so easily discounted. The Leave-leaning media actor/organisation (which covers the opinions of journalists within papers outside of other actors/organisation such as opinion pieces) shows some interesting and somewhat unexpected links.

This includes the idea of Brexit as an Economic Disaster as a key point in the debate. Brexit as an Economic Disaster has had a detailed exploration in a Leave-leaning *Daily Telegraph* article by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard (Evans-Pritchard 2016) in which he explored in detail his reasons for leaving the EU. His article focused on the idea of parliamentary sovereignty whilst admitting that Brexit was likely to cause a lot of economic disruption as is illustrated in the following example “Let there be no illusion about the trauma of Brexit. Anybody who claims that Britain can lightly disengage after 43 years enmeshed in EU affairs is a charlatan, or a dreamer, or has little contact with the realities of global finance and geopolitics.” This statement and the article that follows it offers a fascinating insight into how the Brexit discourse occasionally dipped into more nuanced areas than stating Brexit was an entirely golden opportunity.

So, it seems that the Brexit discourse was not necessarily as narrowly focused as it may first appear. There is evidence of some crossing of narratives in the agreement on Brexit discourses in Leave-leaning media pieces such as that illustrated above. Narratives, however, are not just agreements as previously noted and how the Leave-leaning media disagreed with certain narratives is also important.

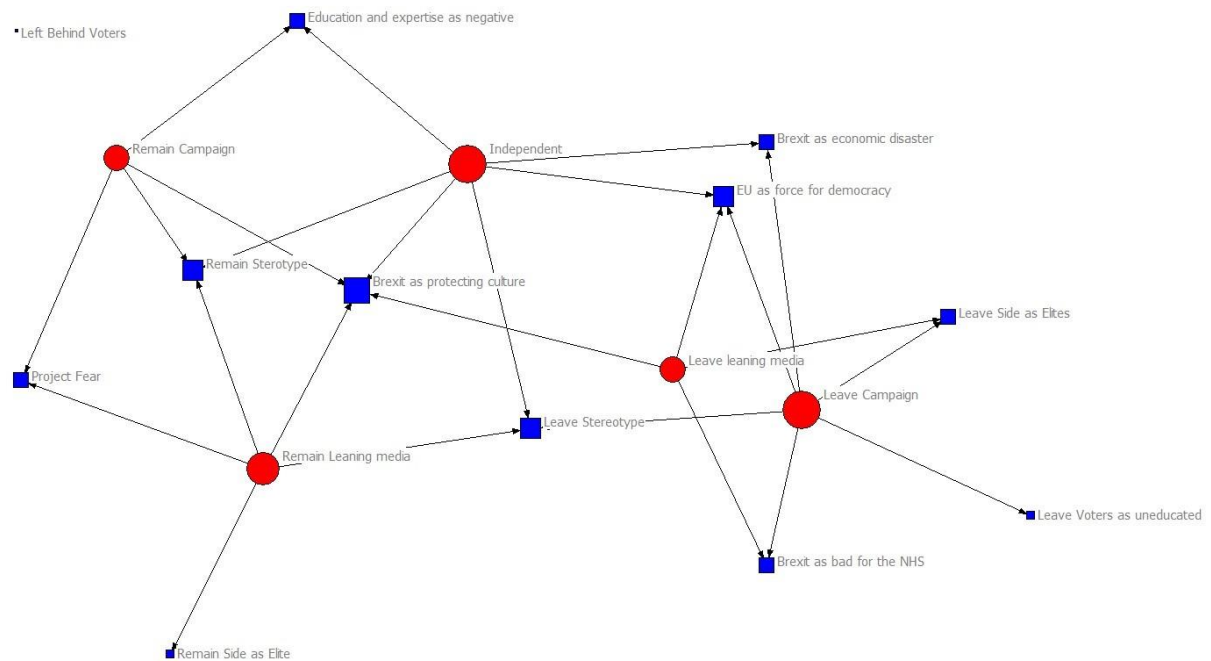


Figure 5.4 Organisations/Categories Brexit Discourse disagreement

Disagreements as previously explained with reference to Figure 5.2 are once again less common in the more specific organisations identified in Figure 5.4 and actors' disagreements with the various narratives. In this case the only significant disagreement with a narrative that would go against expectations for the Leave-leaning media is that of Brexit as "protecting culture". In addition, this only appeared once as a significant point amongst Leave-leaning media and that was in one article by William Hague. It should be noted here that at the point of the referendum, William Hague was not a member of the Remain campaign and was a regular columnist for *The Daily Telegraph*, hence his categorisation as a member of the Leave-leaning media. In the article, William Hague makes a detailed case against one of Leave's key arguments with regards to sovereignty and Brexit as not protecting culture, arguing against a key Leave argument proposing that this was the case. In discussing Scotland's reaction, if, as a country it voted Remain and was then ignored in the following negotiations, he surmised that Brexit could potentially lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. He warned of the potential for a new vote in Scotland saying the following "The stage would thus be set for a new referendum, five or six years from now, with the Nationalists having the best shot they would ever have at breaking up the United Kingdom" (Hague 2016). Appearing in a Leave-

leaning paper and with such strong support with regards to a negative narrative on Brexit and disagreeing with one of the main Leave points, this article like the earlier article by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, indicates that there was at times some modicum of balance and disagreement with key aspects of the Leave debate even amongst Leave-leaning media.

It should be noted that whilst these articles are significant indicators that the narrative put forward by the Leave-leaning media was not totally biased in favour of Leave and there was an inclusion of arguments by Remainers in the Leave-leaning papers, coverage was mostly as would be expected amongst the Leave papers and these exceptions, whilst significant, represented not the norm but exceptions to it.

Amongst the Remain papers the story was a little more complex in both agreement and disagreement with Brexit narratives. As can be seen in Figure 5.3 the Remain-leading media was found to support the idea that some groups of voters had been left behind. This was true in both the case of *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. The writer Owen Jones in *The Guardian* spent some time discussing the idea that 'left-behind voters' could prove a major problem to the Remain campaign as illustrated in several statements such as "When presented with a vote on the status quo, it is no surprise that those with the least stake in it vote to abandon it" and "For many places, the pace of change and the pressure on public services have arguably proved to be too much to cope with" (Jones 2016). *The Independent* articles echoed these thoughts and warned that any perceived benefits were more likely to harm 'left-behind voters' than help. As Ian Birrell (Birrell 2016) states in one article "Citizens fuming about political failure will only end up feeling more betrayed if they support it and a successful vote for withdrawal fails to save the NHS, sparks mass housebuilding or stops immigration." Therefore, in many ways in the Remain press, much like in the Leave press, arguments were present which showed the Leave side of the debate, even if they were not prevalent. It must be noted, however, that the 'left-behind voters' was a particular category in the debate where the argument against was not seen in the statements analysed. They were the only category where this was the case. Whilst disagreement with other categories was present, if at times not common, the idea of 'left-behind voters' seemed to be one that had relatively broad acceptance.

With regards to disagreements with narratives, there were again, as with the Leave-leaning media, a dearth of examples. There was, however, a noteworthy article once again arguing against the category of the Leave stereotype in an article in the Remain-leaning *The Guardian*. Larry Elliot made the following statement with regards to the Brexit campaign “There is a modern and progressive argument for leaving the EU, yet it has struggled to be heard during this dispiriting campaign” (Elliot 2016). This at the same time both rejects the common stereotypes of who Leave voters could be but at the same time is not necessarily putting forward the Leave side’s agenda.

The Brexit discourse and newspaper representation are not completely polarised. Elements of both sides of the debate leaked into both Leave and Remain newspapers. Yet this was not pronounced in the coverage on the specific views of the media itself. There was some difference but as can be seen above, much of the difference can be put down to the reporting of politicians’ statements to counter them which perpetuated which side of the debate the paper leaned towards. The exceptions to this were as listed above along with a scattered handful of others, but whilst the narratives were polarised to a very large degree, they were not completely polarised. The same cannot be said for the UK General Election of 2017 in which the occasional blur of narratives between opposing media seen in the Brexit discourses is comparatively dwarfed.

Discourse Network Analysis of newspapers in and around the time of the 2017 General Election.

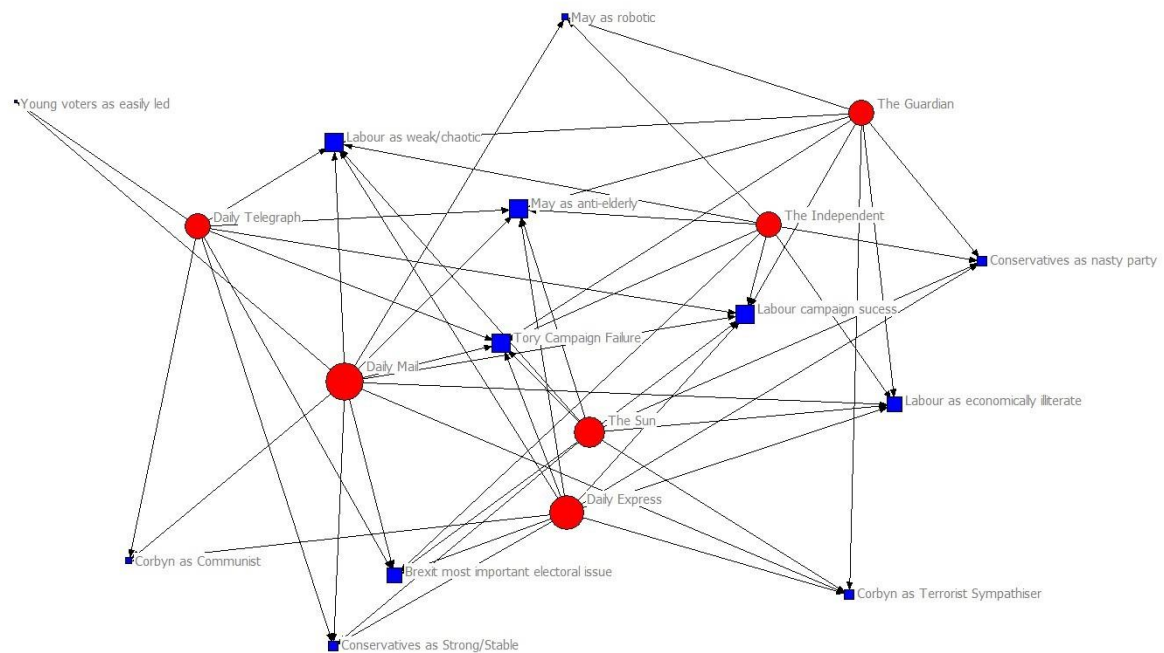
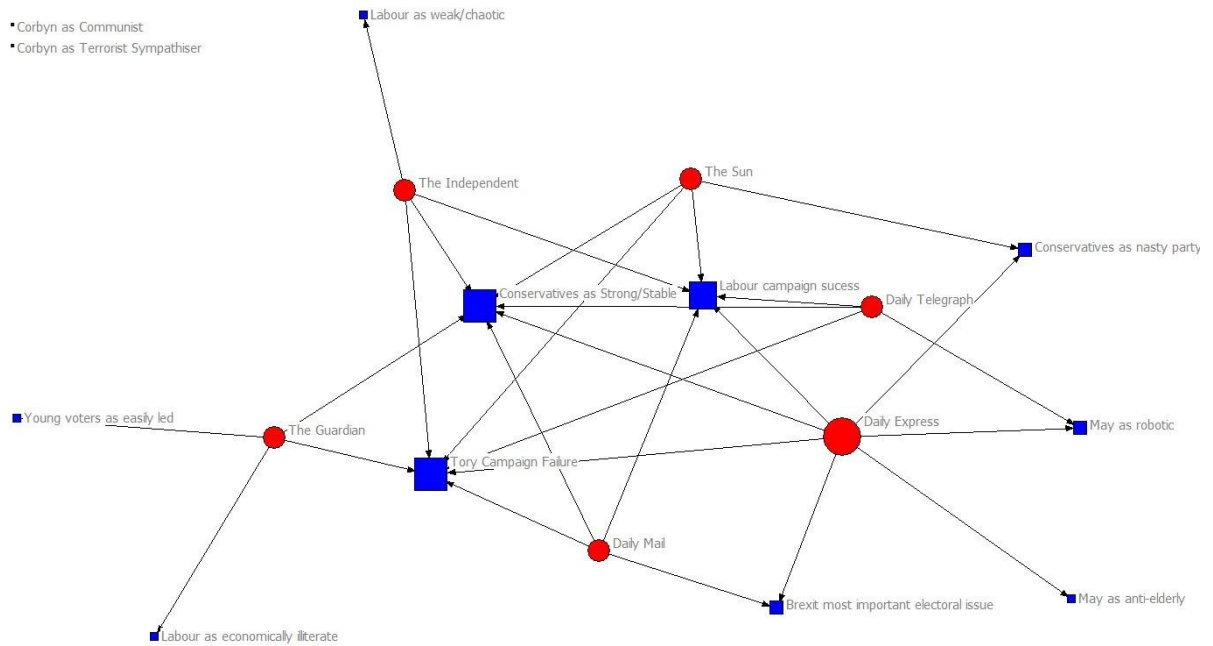


Figure 5.5 Person/Category General Election discourse agreement

In looking at Figure 5.5, one can see straight away that most narratives crossed over to more than one paper (For a visualisation of the codings for Figures 5.5 and 5.6 see Appendix 3 Table 5.3). Categories critiquing both the Labour campaigns and Conservative campaigns, as well as the categories associated with the respective Party leaders, show die-hard reporting across all papers. Surprisingly at first, the idea of the Labour campaign succeeding and the Conservative campaign failing, finds a mention in all the newspapers at some point. In addition, derisive labelling, such as Theresa May being 'robotic' finds agreement with the Conservative supporting *Daily Mail*, whilst inflammatory labelling of Jeremy Corbyn as a terrorist sympathizer, is reported in both *The Guardian* and *The Independent* as well as much of the Conservative-leaning press.



**Figure 5.6 Person/Category General Election
discourse disagreement**

A look at the disagreement narratives shows even more mixing of narratives. Again, surprises such as the Labour-leaning *The Guardian* and *The Independent* disagreeing with the idea of Labour having a successful campaign occurs, as is disagreement with the Tories having an unsuccessful campaign. Statements in articles which support the Conservatives, such as them being Strong and Stable, find disagreement not just with the Labour-leaning media but also the Conservative-leaning media. What is also noteworthy is that some narratives do not have the rousing defence one would expect in disagreement against them. Take note of the category of May being 'Anti-Elderly' in which Table 5.5 shows an agreement with the narrative by all papers and disagreement only by the *Daily Express*. Disagreements with certain narrative points about Jeremy Corbyn were also not prevalent in disagreements evidencing there was at least some consensus that portrayals of him as a terrorist sympathizer or communist were difficult to argue against or best left ignored.

With just a preliminary glance, the General Election discourse appears to be slightly different in the scope of how polarised it was compared to the Brexit

discourse. A true reflection is better evidenced below in Figure 5.7 (For a visualisation of the codings for Figures 5.7 and 5.8 see Appendix 3 Figure 5.4)

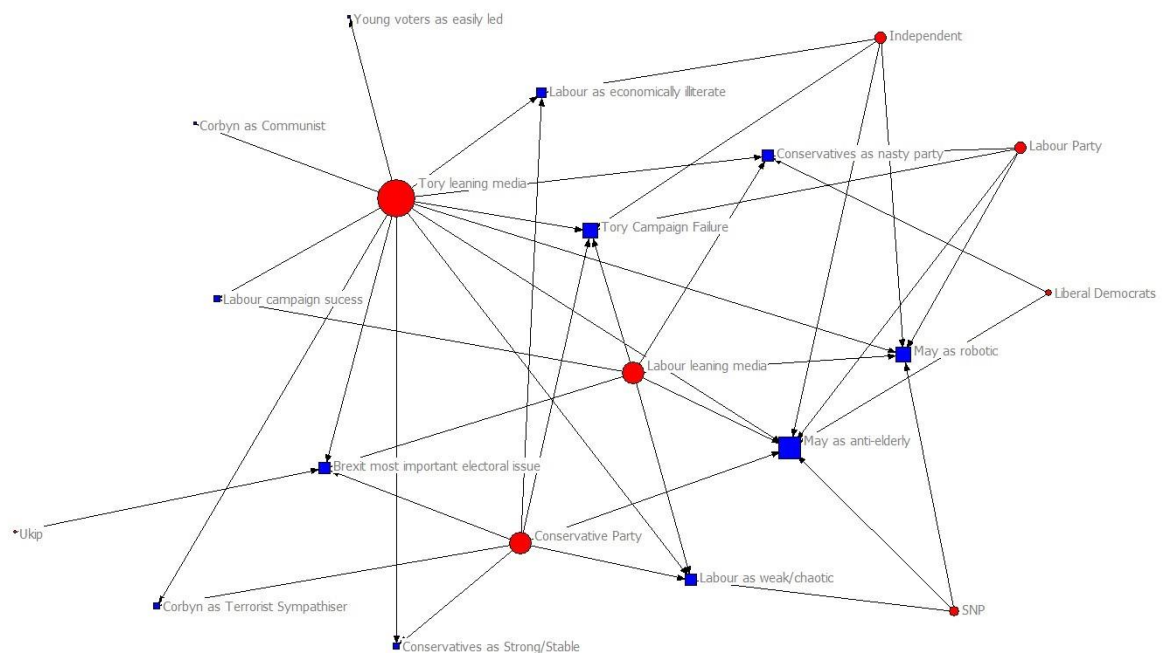


Figure 5.7. Organisation/Category General Election discourse agreement

As can be seen above, the Tory-leaning media participated in all the categories in agreement. Some of these are understandable and expected, such as one criticising Jeremy Corbyn's Labour as being weak or chaotic. What is more surprising is just how dominant negative perception of the Conservatives was present and the degree to which traditional Conservative media agreed with these narratives. The idea of Tory campaign failure and Labour campaign success being reported in a paper as strongly aligned with the Conservatives as the *Daily Mail* for example, would be surprising. But several articles for that paper stated exactly that. Quentin Letts (Letts 2017) writing in the *Daily Mail* for example noted "A big problem with this Tory campaign has been that it has not projected the party as the agents of Brexit change, which they certainly are" following this up with "Labour has tapped into Youth iconoclasm, despite being the party of dreary establishment bores who want to keep us bound to the EU". Whilst it is certainly damning, with faint praise for the efforts of Labour, the point Letts is making is clear which is that the Conservative campaign had suffered from major problems.

It is not the only paper making this statement. Articles in other Leave-leaning media show similar reservations. An article in *The Sun* by Phillip Collins (Collins

2017) comparing the election to a horse race in which the favourite is doing poorly (in this case Theresa May) says of Mr Corbyn in one statement “Mr Corbyn is having a fine campaign. He is enjoying himself out there”. Another article in *The Daily Telegraph* by Jeremy Warner is pretty stark in its opinion. “It’s hard to exaggerate what a complete disaster the Conservative Party election manifesto has turned out to be” (Warner 2017). Even the *Daily Express* had serious reservations as Macer Hall writes in one article conveying a sense of worry over the results. “Approaching the final lap of the most farcical and accident-prone electoral chase in living memory, she is just about keeping her wheels ahead of the opposition as next Thursday’s polling day looms” (Hall 2017).

As mentioned above in the earlier analysis of Brexit, there were only a trickle of articles illuminating true critiques of each side’s arguments. In fact, examples of such articles were rare. However, in the General Election, the opposite is the case. Whilst a certain savageness may be expected by the British press against the opposing party compared to the one they intend to endorse, it is rare that the Opposition receives backhanded compliments for a campaign well run and for that to be comparatively common. It is even more unusual for the Tory-leaning press to levy the degree of attacks which they waged against their own party, but this is what was observed in the 2017 General Election, particularly in the latter stages. By the second half of the campaign, and particularly after the Tory manifesto’s release, Theresa May and the Tory campaign were attacked even by newspapers traditionally aligned to the Tory party.

As another example, the portrayal of Theresa May as ‘robotic’ was a common thread in the Labour-leaning media. It was, unsurprisingly, a way to caricature the opposition. What is more surprising is that the *Daily Mail* had more than one writer who not only agreed with the caricature but used it and related tangents vehemently in critiquing May. Richard Littlejohn for example states “Mother Theresa’s not the new Iron Lady, she’s the new Grocer Heath. She even laughs like him” (LittleJohn 2017) and “Theresa doesn’t have to bore us into submission, but she’s decided to do it anyway” both of which are harsh critiques of May’s personality and style. Dan Hodges goes further in his robot comparison “Before she begins she does the May pause, where she has to physically will herself to start speaking” and “The strategy of hiding her from

voters and the press is born of necessity, not opportunity” (Hodges 2017). In both cases these writers have taken the caricature of May as ‘robotic’ and embraced it and the respective articles in which these comments appear expand upon these critiques. The above are just a few examples from the Tory-leaning media in their criticism of May and the campaign. The same is not as prevalent from the Labour-leaning media with regards to Corbyn although a sense of pessimism was prominent (as will be seen later in the disagreement discourse). Many of the negative aspects associated with Corbyn, such as him being a communist or terrorist sympathizer, went unreported in the Labour-leaning press. There are one or two examples of Labour being viewed as weak or chaotic, such as John Kentoul’s opinion in *The Guardian* that “Corbyn’s leadership is weak, and his failure to command the support of his MP’s is pretty fundamental” but these discourses are far less prominent than the comparative savaging that Theresa May received from the Tory-leaning press.

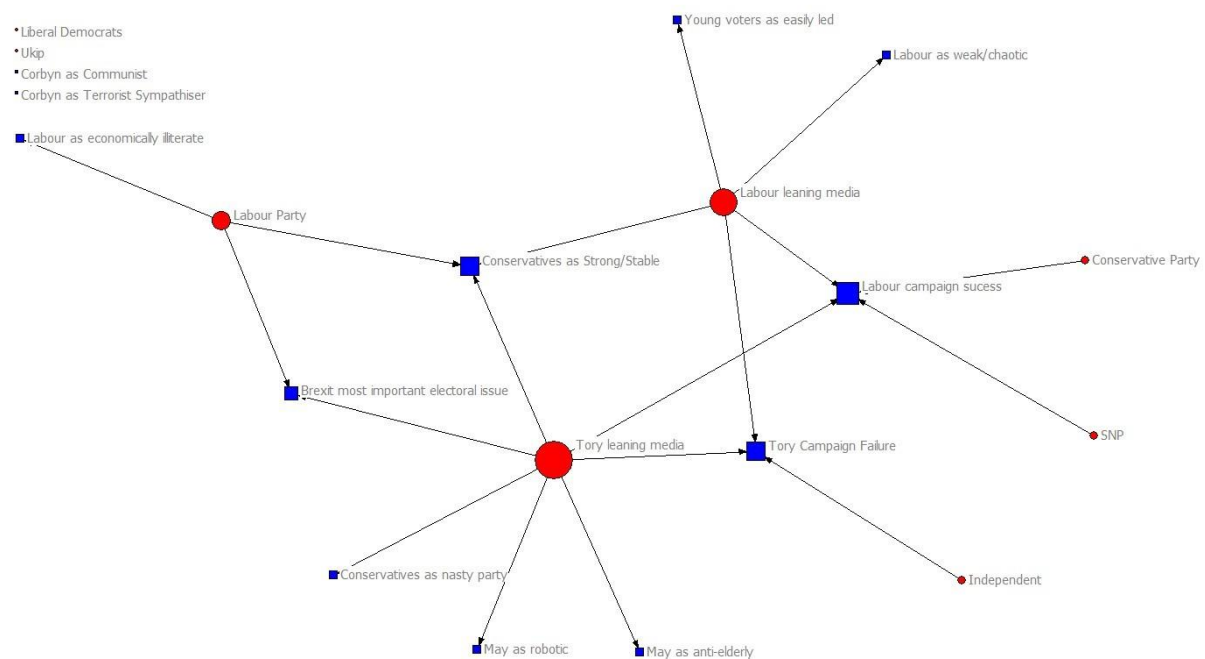


Figure 5.8. Organisation/Category General Election discourse disagreement

The Disagreement discourse with regards to Organisation fills in the final detail surrounding the General Election discourse. It offers some surprising and

unsurprising results. It is unsurprising in that many of the negative discourses are predictably disagreed with by a party's respecting media, such as May being 'anti-elderly' and the Conservatives as 'the nasty party' having disagreement discourses in the Tory-leaning media. What is surprising, if one does not know the agreement discourse, is the critiques of the parties in discourses they would be expected to agree with. Notably the Labour-leaning media's disagreement with the idea of Tory campaign failure and Labour campaign success, as well as the Tory-leaning media's disagreement with Conservatives as strong and stable. In the Tory-leaning media's case, this was prominent during the latter half of the campaign after the disaster of their Manifesto and was included in various papers such as the previously mentioned articles by Macer Hall and Phillip Collins in the discussion on discourse agreement above. In other words, the idea of Conservatives as strong and stable was disagreed with among a multitude of Leave-leaning media articles at various points, particularly during the latter part of their Election campaign.

The Labour-leaning media by contrast, whilst it did engage in some negative reporting against the party's situation, was often tempered by a cautious optimism. Examples of engaging in negative agreement among the Labour-leaning media was far less prominent than the case of the Conservatives. As an example, a statement in *The Guardian* on the final day of the campaign stated the following: "An upbeat Prime Minister said she was feeling good as she ended the final day of campaigning with some pollsters saying she would extend her majority to dozens of seats" (Asthana et al 2017). This was tempered by the rest of the article which took a more nuanced approach.

The discourses around the General Election are a stark contrast to what is found in the Brexit campaign. The Brexit campaign had some crossing of narrative, but these were seldom seen and while neither side was cut off from information about the other side, when the media were writing editorial articles themselves, they rarely strayed from what was expected. On the other hand, the Conservative-leaning media tore into its favoured party in many cases as the Conservative campaign encountered problems whilst small amounts of initial pessimism turned to tempered optimism in the Labour-leaning media. In all the discourses, the most prominent point of interest is the interaction between the Conservative-leaning media's interaction and portrayal of the

Conservative party in the General Election campaign. Whilst many articles were supportive, what is clear in the analysis is the extent to which negative narratives with regards to the Conservatives not only appeared in the Labour-leaning media but found a place in the Conservative-leaning media, even amongst the Conservative party's traditionally strongest supporting media outlets.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF Q-SORTS

This Chapter will analyse the Q-Sorts gathered in the study and the information they revealed about participants' opinions on The Brexit Campaign and The General Election Campaign of 2017.

The amount of information gathered in a selection of Q-Sorts can often be overwhelming. As such, there will not be an individual analysis of each Q-Sort present in the overall sample because to attempt to do so would likely require a book of some length. Collectively however, in both the Brexit Q-Sorts and the Election Q-Sorts administered, a fascinating amount of data can be extracted which offers an exciting amount of information for analysis and later, discussion, compared to what was gathered in the previously analysed discourse network analysis.

Brexit Q-Sorts

The Brexit Q-Sorts offered a range of perspectives and although there is a large amount of similar views shared between the Factors that were extracted, there are also significant differences between these perspectives.

The process of Factor extraction was run (through Ken-Q analysis) for the Brexit Q-Sorts with the aim of extracting five Factors. Of the five Factors extracted, Factor 4 was of negligible interest (as shown in the scree plot in Figure 6.1 below) with an Eigenvalue just over 0.2 and its weak position, in comparison to the other Factors on relevance to the discourse overall, have resulted in it being excluded from this analysis. The remaining Factors will be discussed below.

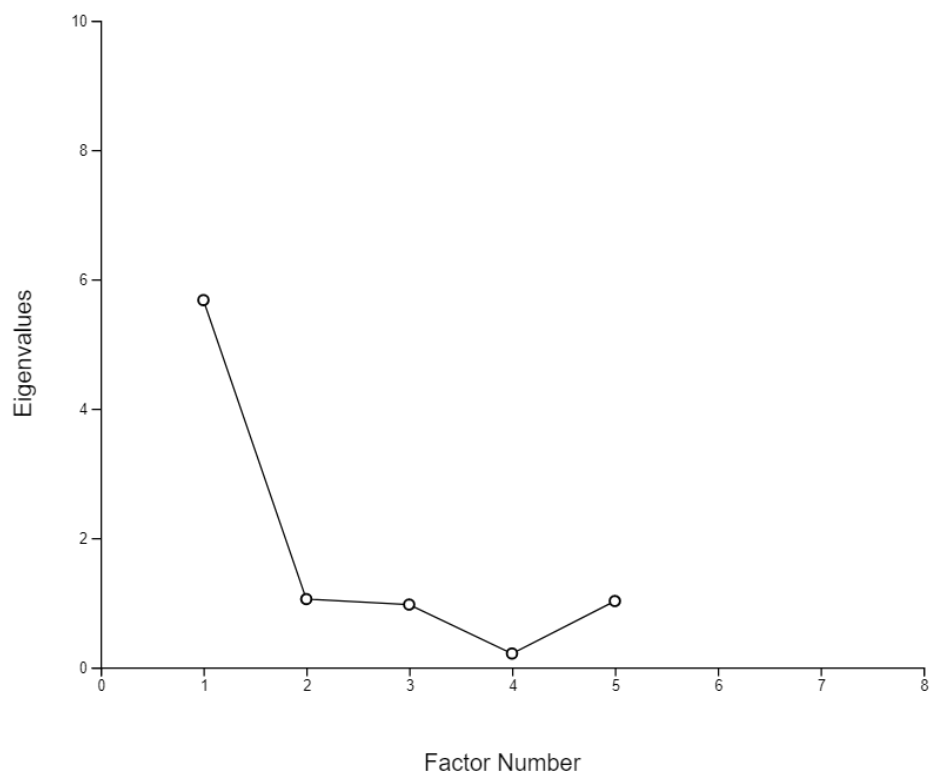


Figure 6.1 Scree plot of Brexit Q-Sort Factors

Factor 1: The Optimistic Brexiteer

For Factor 1, three participants loaded onto the Factor after the application of Varimax Rotation.

Those were Participant M, Participant O and with negative correlation, Participant J. The Composite Q-Sort of Factor 1 is pictured below.

Composite Q sort for Factor 1

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
20	15	11	14	32	40	38	10	41	44	19
47	26	1	7	33	30	42	23	29	3	36
	17	4	8	28	39	5	31	37	22	
		13	2	9	34	6	43	24		
			48	16	12	25	27			
				18	35	21				
					45					
					46					

Figure 6.2

I have profiled Factor 1 as being the “**Optimistic Brexiteer**”.

As can be evidenced in the composite Q-Sort above and the accompanying list of statements, the commitment of this type of Leave voter was unshaken in their belief that leaving the EU would both show little effect on the economy and was far more likely lead to far better outcomes. They held that there would be a much more positive future outside of the EU with little to no significant cost associated with the act of leaving. This type of Leave voter was, even at the time of the Q-Sort in June 2019, still unconvinced with respect to arguments such as the impact of Brexit on the NHS and the potential negative impacts leaving the EU would have on the economy.

How this voter was swayed is best evidenced with the “agreed with” Statements of 19, 22 and 31 and the “disagreed with” Statements of 26 and 20.

Statement 26 and 20 both emphasize the negatives of Brexit. Statement 26 states that anyone who claims Brexit would be cost free would be lying. Statement 20, by comparison, offered a sober dose of medicine on the potential economic impacts which were once again “disagreed with” strongly by participants.

By contrast, Statements 19 and 22 both emphasised the “Sunlit Uplands” of Boris Johnson in that both statements focused on the amazing positives associated with leaving for the NHS, as well as a dire warning that should Brexit not go ahead the NHS would in fact suffer.

Statement 31 meanwhile emphasized the bogeyman that Remain could be against the Brexit voter. As a statement, it strongly implied that Remain voters looked down on many of the Leave voters’ concerns as irrelevant, or even worse, as actively negative.

As a result, this Factor very much emphasized the emotive “British can do” attitude and “fighting for the underdog spirit” which the Leave campaign excelled in portraying to the Leave electorate.

The two participants who positively correlated with the Optimistic Brexiteer Factor Type were Participant M and Participant O. Participant M had a score of 0.7382 in agreement and Participant O had a not much smaller score of 0.665 (see Appendix 5). A look at both of those Participant individuals’ Q-Sorts shows that they are in significant agreement with this factor (see Appendix 6 for individual Q-Sorts).

Statements by Participant M and Participant O in the short questionnaire further illuminate the issue.

In answer to question 2 for example (See Appendix 7 for Questionnaire used), Participant M put

“Remain were terrible and Leave told the truth much more. The country’s still booming so Remain were clearly scaremongering.”

Participant O's brief but self-explanatory answer to question 4 further emphasises the point.

"No Deal!!!"

Despite its succinctness, the emphasis with both Participants' Q-Sorts and answers was clear.

Factor 1 is the factor that still believes in the Brexit put forward in the original referendum campaign of "Having your cake and eating it." This is particularly the case where the NHS is a central factor.

However, Factor 1 also possesses one of the most intriguing aspects of the analysis of the Q-Sort data for Brexit which is the problem raised by Participant J.

Participant J did not particularly positively correlate with any of the four Factors that made it to the Post Varimax rotation output stage. The highest positive correlation was in fact to Factor 2, but at 0.2208 even this was of no significant positive correlation as to have an impact or be worthy of particular mention.

On the other hand, Participant J had a significant negative correlation with Factor 1 of -0.5114 and whilst this was not the only negative correlation observed in the analysis of the Q-Sort, it was easily the most significant.

A quick glance at the general list of statements compared with Participant J's own Q-Sort quickly reveals the reasons as to why the extreme negative correlation with Factor 1 might have appeared.

Table 6.1 Q-Sort of Participant J

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
Participant J Sort	-1	-2	-3	3	2	1	1	-2	-3	2	4	-3
	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24
Participant J Sort	-1	0	3	0	4	-1	-2	5	-1	-4	1	-3
	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36
Participant J Sort	4	5	-1	1	0	2	1	-2	2	-2	0	-1
	S37	S38	S39	S40	S41	S42	S43	S44	S45	S46	S47	S48
Participant J Sort	0	-5	1	0	0	2	0	-5	-4	-4	3	3

Participant J gives some of the highest positive scores to Statement 20 (which scored a +5) and Statement 26 (scored a + 5).

These two statements are among the five distinguishing statements which make up Factor 1.

Statement 19 however, is ranked rather lowly in comparison at -2 whilst Statement 22 is vehemently disagreed with. This is a complete turnaround in perspective from the standard answer for a normal participant who loaded onto Factor 1 positively.

The questionnaires, though brief in detail, provide the answer, in particular, Participant J's response to the fourth question on their preferred way forward on Brexit.

"Peoples Vote. I voted Leave at the time hoping to achieve something close to a Norway deal allowing us to escape many of the worst excesses of the EU such as the CAP and the Common Fisheries Policy. May's deal solves few of the problems associated with EU membership while providing even more

drawbacks and leaving with it in place would be both economically damaging and irresponsible for any capable leader. In such a scenario I would vote Remain with a heavy heart as a no-deal would be economically a catastrophe that would probably result in us re-joining within a decade anyway with far worse terms than we currently operate on having resumed our place as “The Sick Man of Europe”.

Factor 1 thus offers a fascinating view of those perspectives aligned with what it represents, the idea of a pure form of Brexit which will benefit the NHS unhampered by anything but the firm conviction that Brexit will work. Even if this includes placing high priority on statements such as Statement 3 which inherently dismisses the value of experts.

Factor 2: “The Sovereignty Brexiteer”.

Composite Q sort for Factor 2

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
48	17	8	19	30	11	21	6	33	31	27
1	12	46	4	7	44	41	5	10	29	23
	47	13	45	3	28	34	25	35	36	
		2	15	26	43	37	38	39		
			18	16	20	40	42			
				14	22	32				
					9					
						24				

Figure 6.3

Factor 2 was the highest loaded Factor for seven Participants (A,C,E,F,G,I and L) and if it were not for the anomalous Participant H (who shall be discussed later) it would have had a slim majority as the Factor most loaded on by the Q-Sort participants.

Factor 2 is significantly different to Factor 1. If Factor 1 is The Optimistic Brexiteer then Factor 2 is a lot less fervent and more pessimistic in its belief.

In analysing the data, some key differences are immediately noticeable. Statement 19, one of the strongest ranked statements for Factor 1, drops significantly from +5 to -2. Meanwhile, Statement 20, one of the two lowest ranked statements in Factor 1, moves to the centre indicating, if not agreement, then at least not a significant amount of disagreement. What is also noteworthy is that Statement 3 moves from a position of high agreement to a position of minor disagreement following a similar trajectory to Statement 19.

Further analysis of the strongest agreed statements of the two factors indicated the reasons behind the drastic movements up and down the matrix.

Of the five statements in the strongest form of agreement of Factor 1 (Statements 36,19,44,3 and 22) only Statement 36 of the top five remains present in a position of strong agreement.

Of the other four statements, Statements 22 and 44 move to the position of 0, Statement 3 moves to -1 and Statement 19 moves to -2.

Clearly, whilst there are some aspects of agreement between the two Factors, there is also far more disagreement on key aspects.

The NHS in this scenario is not viewed by those with highest loadings on Factor 2 as being a significant beneficiary of Brexit. A quick scan of the individual Q-Sorts shows agreement on Statement 19 ranges from “quite strong disagreement” (Participants L and G with a score of -3) to the more neutral range of the Q-Sort (Participants C and F with a score of 0) with Statement 19 placing at varying different points of disagreement in-between these two areas for the remaining participants.

Considering this is one of the key characteristics of the Optimistic Brexiteer, this is significant.

The distinguishing statements of Factor 2 reveal additional aspects to the character of Factor 2.

The Statement that was in a zone of agreement was Statement 31 and the statements in disagreement were Statements 3,12 and 1.

The placement of Statement 31 is relatively self-explanatory and a quick analysis of it and other strongly ranked statements quickly pinpoints to what is the key unifying aspects of those statements which loaded strongest onto Factor 2. It is the issue of “sovereignty” and the feeling of having a “lack of say” in how their lives are run amongst neglected communities. Sovereignty and the perceived lack of it within the EU felt by many poorer communities in Britain, were the key issues for this group. The most agreed upon statements are those emphasising a loss of democracy and the uncomfortable reality of feeling as though you are powerless. Therefore, I have profiled the Factor 2 Brexiteer as being a “**Sovereignty Brexiteer**”.

Factor 2 paints a far less optimistic gung-ho version of Brexit. Rather than rushing out the door to give more money to the NHS, Factor 2 instead paints a much different picture.

That is not to say that Factor 2 is anti-Brexit in any respect, but as a whole, it is far less naïvely positive and much more gritted teeth to escape the shackles of an institution which is (in the views of the participants whose Q-Sorts were loaded onto it) damaging for the future of the United Kingdom and more importantly, it’s democracy – particularly for the country’s poorest individuals.

The very strongest “disagreed with” statements also paint a picture.

As mentioned earlier, Statement 20 moves to a place of high disagreement (-5) in Factor 1 to a neutral zone (0) in Factor 2.

It is not the only statement to do so as Statement 26, another significant statement, also drastically moves from a place of high disagreement to one that is far less severe at -1.

However, the fact these two distinguishing statements remain in the sphere of disagreement indicated that whilst Factor 1 and Factor 2 may differ significantly in their most “agreed with” statements, their most “disagreed with” statements do not differ as much.

Of the remaining two distinguishing statements of Factor 2 (those being Statements 12 and 1), the more significant movement is with Statement 12 (ranked -4) which moves up to a neutral position (0) for Factor 1. Statement 1 by comparison is comparatively static only moving to -3 from -5.

The movement of Statement 12 is at best a guessing game given that its point should seem to be one of “significant disagreement” with both types of participants. However, given the significant movement observed by other statements which might at first seem like they should have had a broad consensus (as an example, Statement 3), I have concluded it is likely that scaremongering and the advice of economists would be far more likely to be ignored by a participant who loaded onto Factor 1 than participants who loaded onto Factor 2. Participants who loaded onto Factor 2 lend more credence to “experts” than Factor 1 participants and are therefore, more liable to disagree with the statement in question.

The questionnaire responses provide even more of an insight into Factor 2 from the many participants on to whom it loaded most highly.

Participant A, for example, expressed no small amount of displeasure in how the newsprint media represented the campaign:

“I think a lot of the print media was a lot more vitriolic and sensational, particularly the ‘opinion’ pieces from say, *The Guardian*, which seemed to garner a lot more coverage than they usually do.”

Participant C was also less than pleased with the state of the debate overall.

“In some cases, I feel conversation was hindered by some politicians trying to insult the character of another, but unfortunately this happens in all areas of politics, so the Brexit campaigns were no different.”

Other participants who loaded onto Factor 2 had similar responses to Participants A and C on the quality of the discourse surrounding the debate.

Responses as to what “deal” was desired by participants made for a far more interesting read and perspectives ranged from a “managed no-deal” to a “no-deal straight away” and there was very little receptiveness to “May’s deal” from any of those who loaded primarily onto Factor 2.

On one particular point, it must be noted that Participant L had the least agreement with Factor 2 despite it being the Factor Participant L loaded with the most.

A quick glance at Participant L's Q-Sort indicates why.

Table 6.2 Q-Sort of Participant L

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
Participant L Sort	-2	-3	0	-4	2	3	0	-1	-2	-4	4	-5
	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24
Participant L Sort	0	4	-2	5	-1	-1	-3	1	1	0	1	0
	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36
Participant L Sort	3	-2	3	-2	3	-1	1	-1	4	-1	2	-3
	S37	S38	S39	S40	S41	S42	S43	S44	S45	S46	S47	S48
Participant L Sort	2	5	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	-3	-5	-4

Compared to the standard Factor 2 matrix, Participant L seems to be quite different to the typical participant who loaded onto this Factor. There is a significantly less sympathetic or neutral attitude to the statements complimentary of UKIP and a far more fact-based interpretation of what might occur. Key amongst this are the high weightings given for statements

emphasising these attitudes such as Statements 16, 11 and 14. In addition, the distinguishing statements are weighted somewhat lower and many of the other statements present in L's Q-Sort indicate less correlation than the other participants.

Participant L's disdain for UKIP (and the Brexit party as an extension) is present in their questionnaire when asked about the media coverage represented in the Q-Sort.

"The coverage seems to be pretty accurate, especially given Farage seems to be haunting the cards (*the cards used in the Q-Sort*) like he did in the campaign."

The more pronounced negative reactions to UKIP and more modest agreement with loading patterns to the distinguishing statements for Factor 2 may explain Participant L's lower correlation whilst still loading onto Factor 2 the most.

Despite Participant L's more tepid agreement, the factor as a whole still stands, and it does not correlate highly with Factor 1's distinguishing statements or any of the other factors.

Overall however, Factor 2 and Factor 1 do have some overlap in their correlation as can be seen below in Table 6.3.

Factor score correlations				
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 5
Factor 1	1	0.54	0.2001	0.361
Factor 2	0.54	1	0.2396	0.5064
Factor 3	0.2001	0.2396	1	0.1692
Factor 5	0.361	0.5064	0.1692	1

Table 6.3 Factor Score Correlations for Brexit Q-Sorts

Factor 1 correlates more highly with Factor 2 than any of the other factors, although it should be noted that Factor 2 also correlates highly with Factor 5 which will be discussed later.

This strong correlation between the two factors leads to the intriguing case of Participant H.

Participant H did not appear flagged for any particular dominant factor individually because Participant H was in the unique position among the Brexit Q-Sorts as to have close enough together loadings on both the first two Factors that he remained unflagged as loading on to any.

This development, much like Participant J's high negative correlation with Factor 1 and L's less pronounced correlation with Factor 2, is worthy of a closer look as seen below in Table 6.4

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
Participant H Sort	-4	-1	1	-4	5	0	-2	-4	-1	3	-1	-2
	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24
Participant H Sort	-5	-1	-3	-5	-3	-3	3	-2	0	3	1	3
	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36
Participant H Sort	2	-2	1	0	5	4	4	0	2	0	2	2
	S37	S38	S39	S40	S41	S42	S43	S44	S45	S46	S47	S48
Participant H Sort	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	4	-2	-1	-1	-3

Table 6.4 Q-Sort of Participant H

Participant H seems to be trying his best to emulate Solomon the Wise and cut a child in half. Of the distinguishing statements for Factor 1 (Statements 19,22,31,26 and 20) and the distinguishing statements of Factor 2 (Statements 31,3,12 and 1) Participant H seems to be split quite evenly.

On the shared Statement of 31, Participant H directly correlates to Factor 2.

For the positive Statements of 19 and 22, he correlates at +3, a position close to Factor 1.

For the negative Statement of 26 he is close to Factor 2's position 0-1

For Statement 20, a point of disagreement almost exactly between the -5 of Factor 1 and the 0 of Factor 2 is reached.

For Statement 3, a point between the +4 of Factor 1 and the -1 of Factor 2 of +1 is found.

Thus, Participant H presents something of an enigma as he is loading quite closely on a number of distinguishing statements with more than one Factor.

As a result, Participant H paints a confused picture by being halfway between an Optimistic Brexiteer and a Sovereignty Brexiteer.

This interesting quirk shows that even when Factors are extracted, not every participant is going to align strongly with one particular Factor and that multiple loadings are possible.

Factor 3: The Dedicated Brexiteer

Composite Q sort for Factor 3

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
31	17	16	18	7	24	47	27	2	37	43
13	38	1	36	4	26	15	33	25	9	40
	28	34	11	5	48	10	39	44	41	
		30	32	19	8	42	29	23		
			22	6	12	3	35			
				14	20	46				
					21					
					45					

Figure 6.4

Factor 3 is interesting in that it does not correlate much with the other Factors. The reasons why this might be become obvious once we look a little closer at what makes up the Factor.

Straight away when looking at Factor 3's Q-Sort we can see it is a very different set of viewpoints to that of Factors 1 and 2.

The many distinguishing statements the factor analysis reveals are of immediate interest. They are Statements 43,9,2,47,15,48,36,32,34,30,38 and

28. These many different statements all combine to make the tapestry that is Factor 3.

Of the five statements out of the twelve that distinguish Factor 3 which are “in agreement”, many of them are fascinating in how they are viewed in contrast to other Q-Sorts. Factor 3 is alone in weighing Statements 43 and 9 so highly. These statements being ranked so highly on the matrix are revealing in and of themselves about the key aspect of Factor 3.

Factor 3 does not like the main Leave or Remain campaigns.

Statement 2, expressing its disapproval of the Conservative party in general, is in a significant position of agreement at +3.

Statement 15 expressing the idea that Gove and Johnson are now blaming immigrants for the country’s woes attracts slight agreement at +1.

Statement 32 with the idea of foreign students failing to pay back fees as a bogeyman is ranked lowly at a moderate disagreement of -2.

A quick glance at the overall Q-Sort paints the full picture. Factor 3 has a lot of ire for not just the Remain camp but for the Leave camp as well.

Perhaps Statement 9 best encapsulates the key difference in Factor 3’s attitude towards the Brexit campaign in comparison to the other two previously discussed factors.

“There is a modern and progressive argument for leaving the EU, but it has struggled to be heard in this dispiriting campaign.”

This is perhaps the best and most encapsulating view of Factor 3. A significant disdain for the main Remain campaign as well as the main Leave campaign.

Other distinguishing statements cover the other parts of Factor 3.

The “slight support” for Statement 47 with its acknowledgment of the importance of UK immigrants to the NHS.

The “neutrality” to Statement 48 which acknowledges the real issues of forging new trade agreements.

Factor 3 did not believe in a land of milk and honey. Nor was it quite as obsessed with issues of sovereignty or the working class rising-up as other Factors were.

Instead, Factor 3 seemed to believe in Brexit, not because of the campaign or the argument for and against, but despite the campaigns that went on. As a result, Factor 3 of all the Factors had participants who showed evidence of commitment to the ideas of the Leave campaign from long before the campaigns even began.

Factor 3 could thus be labelled as the “**Dedicated Brexiteer**”, although it showed some correlation with the other two types of Brexiteer discussed so far. The Dedicated Brexiteer had a degree of apathy towards certain types of narratives that came up purely during the campaign and a comparative lack of belief in the idea of working-class voters suddenly overthrowing the shackles of the EU. The disdain by this Factor for the Tories on both sides of the debate, and the tone of the debate in general, was clear from the ranking of statements involving both Cameron as well as Gove and Johnson.

As Participant B said in their answer to Question 3 of the questionnaire on how referenda might be improved

“The Campaigns were solely focused on fearmongering and immigration, both irrelevant and unhelpful to the referendum.”

Participant K was also not particularly enamoured of the debate in their answer to Question 2.

“Both the main Remain and the main Leave campaigns were atrocious. They seemed like liars out for themselves a lot of the time. It was unprofessional and childish. The Alternative Leave Campaign was slightly better, but the tone overall was highly disappointing.”

Unlike other factors though, there was a degree of neutrality as to what the lasting economic consequences would be. The statements emphasising potential negative economic consequences weren't completely disbelieved and instead many exist within the neutral zone. This is very different from what can be observed in the other Factors which tended to view these declarations in a more polarised fashion.

Factor 3's participants don't completely ignore the potential negative consequences of Brexit as can be seen from their ranking of some statements that attach negative aspects to Brexit. Importantly though, despite being aware or believing there could be potential negative consequences, those who loaded onto the Factor didn't particularly care and had believed in the cause of Brexit long enough or through independently reached conclusions that the campaigns themselves did not seem to affect their views away from what they had been before the campaign began. Factor 3 is thus significantly unusual compared to the other Factors and the degree to which it fails to correlate with the others is significant.

It must be noted that both participants who loaded onto Factor 3 said in their opinion of what should come next, that it should be a "no-deal" and although neither participant stated this comment outright in their Brexit questionnaires, they inferred a significantly higher degree of support for Nigel Farage.

Factor 5: The Disdainful Brexiteer

Composite Q sort for Factor 5

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
16	21	14	17	22	11	25	10	40	35	38
31	47	46	7	30	29	26	13	3	27	41
	1	48	5	28	4	42	39	34	36	
		9	8	2	18	20	33	6		
			15	12	37	32	24			
				44	23	43				
					45					
						19				

Figure 6.5

When analysing the final Factor of Factor 5, it is immediately obvious that it is not wholly dissimilar in many respects to Factor 2 (which it correlates the most with as seen above in Table 6.3). Although this correlation is not quite as high as that of Factor 2 and Factor 1, there is also a significant relationship between Factor 5 and Factor 2. This can be seen in the composite Q-Sort pictured below.

Factor 5 also cares deeply about the democratic gap and the sovereignty issue which concerned Factor 2. Unlike Factor 2 however, there is also a lot less focus on “class” and a lot more vitriol for the Remain campaign.

The five distinguishing statements of Factor 5 were Statements 38,34,13,21 and 9.

A quick glance at the statements reveals the initial elephant in the room as Factor 5 presents Statement 13, which is quite complimentary to Remain's argument, relatively high in the matrix. Both participants were the only ones to do so with Participant D placing it at + 3 while participant N placed it at +2. As this seems at first glance to be a possible error by both participants, I enquired further into the response at the time of interview on both occasions, having glanced over the Q-Sort to record the details.

Participant D informed me that whilst they fully supported the idea of Leaving, they could also see how a vote to Remain would not be regarded as ceding control by those who did so. As they felt the statement would be true in the eyes of a Remain voter, they thus placed it highly on the matrix.

Participant N offered a slightly different explanation which had a deeper logic. Despite Participant N's distaste for the EU, they felt the logic behind the statement was sound. They felt that being in the EU would allow for cohesion with other countries and grant a bigger voice. Participant N stated however, that whilst voting Remain may not be regarded as an active vote to cede control, control would inevitably be sacrificed as a result. As Participant N stated themselves "Just because you're not voting for it doesn't mean that's not inevitably going to be what happens".

Although no other participants expressed a similar agreement with Statement 13, it was treated neutrally by two more participants and with only slight disagreement by another.

Statement 13 aside, the other distinguishing statements reveal a significant disdain of the Remain side arguments twinned with a high respect for the Sovereignty arguments associated with Brexit.

Other key distinguishing statements reveal the eclectic mix that makes up Factor 5. The large amount of disagreement with Statement 21 for example is interesting as it is very differently placed to that of the other three Factors. However, it does make sense in the context of looking at the Remain campaign as Factor 5 views it. For participants who loaded onto Factor 5, the scare story about pensioners were the least of the crimes committed by the Remain campaign. Given that Statement 3 is ranked so highly, the disdain for experts means that viewing the claims about pensioners as the worst and most

questionable of the Remain campaign is laughable to those who loaded onto Factor 5.

A look through the other 3 distinguishing statements reveals a similar story. For example, the significant disagreement for Statement 9 makes a lot of sense in that the progressive argument for leaving the EU has in fact been heard in the opinion of those who loaded onto that Factor as they perceive the progressive argument is the one that has persuaded them to vote for Brexit. Progressive in the sense of moving forward as opposed to the Americanisation of the term.

Statement 34 also helps to paint this picture. The large amount of agreement can be read very easily as not a statement on the Leave campaign but purely as one on Cameron and the Remain campaign itself. If read as such, you can see why it ranks so highly for a Factor thoroughly disappointed and angry at the Remain campaign.

Statement 38 is where the other aspect to Factor 5 comes in and that is the issue of Sovereignty.

Whilst the democratic gap and the blight of the “left-behind” were more important for Factor 2, this is not as much the case for those of Factor 5 and it is the high emphasis on Statement 38 with the potential for Brexit to be taken away which emphasises this.

A read through of the other statements adds further context. Factor 5 aren't as disheartened as Factor 3 are at the campaign, mainly because they are fully dedicated to the idea of Leave as a Pro-Democratic exercise. An exercise which they feel is going to lead to a better place with more trade deals and a chance to preserve a way of life.

Factor 5 isn't necessarily optimistic as there is acknowledgment that there could be some bumpy roads ahead. However, it is far more likely to believe that there will be no major negative consequences from Leaving as the participants who loaded onto it don't believe the truly negative consequences will ever really materialise. The disdain, particularly for the Remain campaign, truly typifies this Factor and the questionnaires back this up. Hence why I have christened this factor **The Disdainful Brexiteer**.

Participant N was even aware that they might have fallen into this trap after the completion of the Q-Sort during their questionnaire.

“A lot of people my age did just grasp on to any information they could that supported their side, without even wanting to check it. Crowd hysteria is mad.”

Once again, both participants advocated a no-deal as the Brexit they wished for.

The final question to ask when analysing the Factors is if there is any point where these disparate perspectives seemed to be in relatively harmony or agreement?

The answer to that is yes. There was harmony.

Statements 7,8,10,14,17 25 and 42 all occupied similar locations in every Q-Sort as can be seen in the table below.

Table 6.5 Consensus statements for Brexit Q-Sorts

Statement Number	Factor1 Q-SV	Factor2 Q-SV	Factor3 Q-SV	Factor5 Q-SV
7	-2	-1	-1	-2
8	-2	-3	0	-2
10	2	3	1	2
14	-2	-1	-1	-3
17	-4	-4	-4	-2
25	1	2	3	1
42	1	2	1	1

As can be seen, the Statements above all occupy similar areas of agreement or disagreement and a much closer look at the detail helps to explain this.

These areas are one of consensus in the Brexit debate and involve some significant ideas. This common ground amongst Brexit types shows that there

were some key areas of consensus, even if many other areas that would be believed to be consensual between all Brexit voters actually ended up not being so.

Therefore, the Factors extracted from the Q-Sorts of the Brexit participants reveal a range of views which will be discussed in relation to the discourse network analysis of the relevant papers in the next chapter.

General Election Q Sorts

The General Election was a very different range of Q-Sorts to the Referendum and whilst many of the differences between the Brexit Q-Sorts were of a more subtle nature, the differences between Factors in the General Election Q-Sorts were quite stark. (See Table 6.6 below)

Factor score correlations			
	factor 1	factor 2	factor 3
factor 1	1	-0.2434	0.2619
factor 2	-0.2434	1	0.158
factor 3	0.2619	0.158	1

Table 6.6 Factor Score Correlations for General Election Q-Sorts

For the General Election, three Factors were extracted and subjected to a Varimax rotation (again with Ken-Q Analysis). All Factors were relevant unlike with the Brexit Q-Sorts (See Figure 6.6 below).

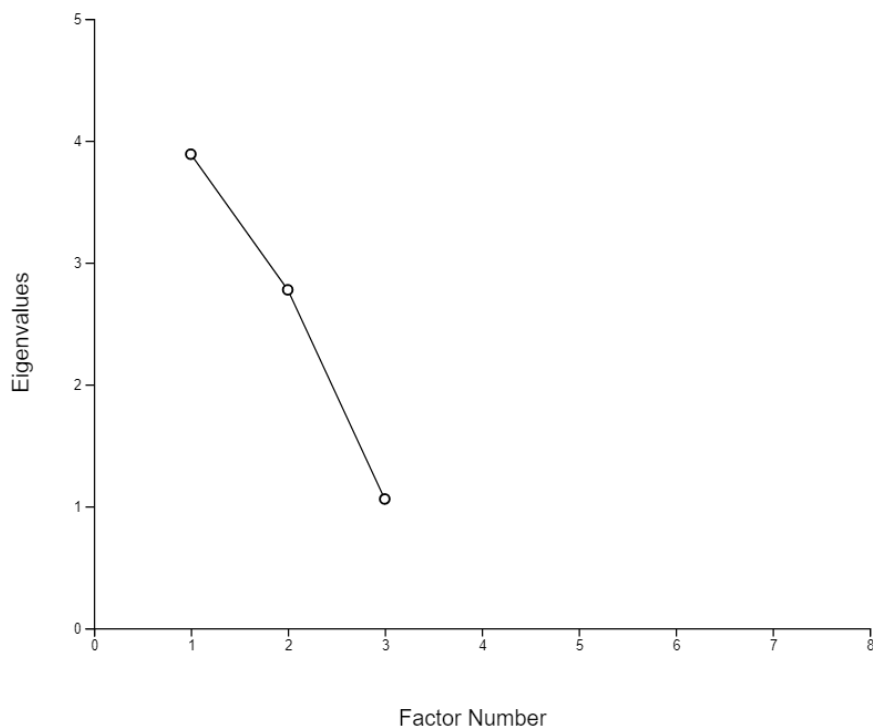


Figure 6.6 Scree plot of General Election Q-Sort Factors

Factor 1: The Exasperated Conservative Voter

The First Factor observed is displayed below in Figure 6.7

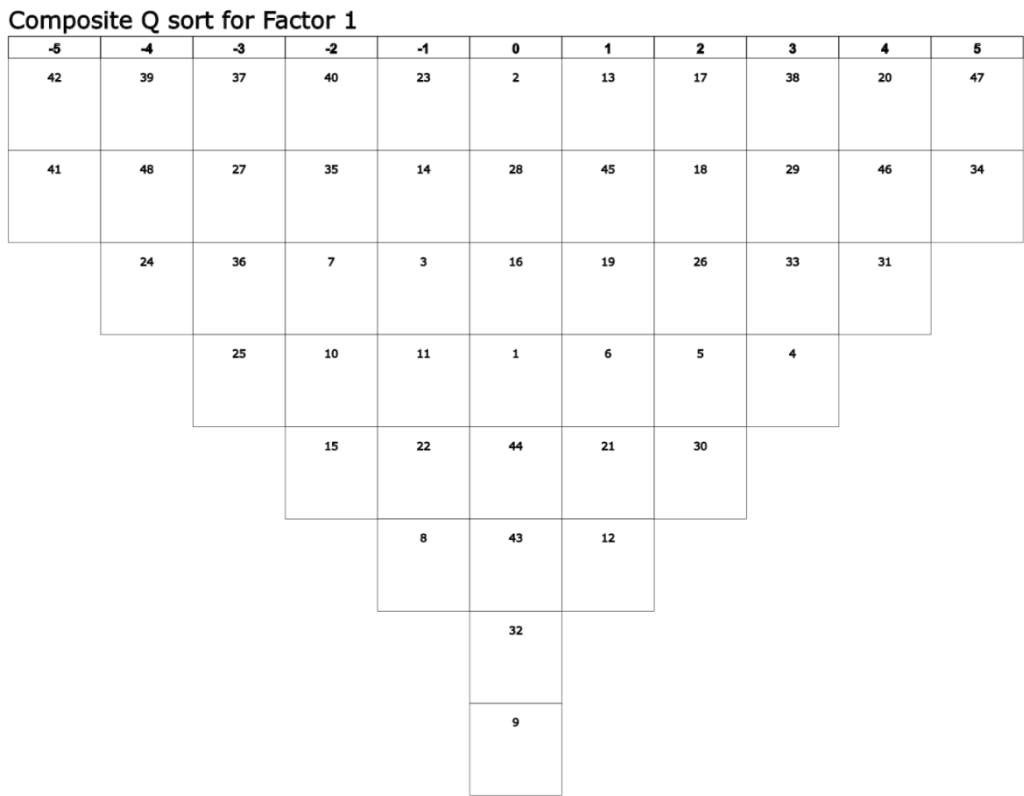


Figure 6.7

An initial glance at the distinguishing Statements of Factor 1 reveals startling aspects to the first Factor straight away. Importantly, five participants loaded onto this Factor (Participants 5,6,8,11 and 15). With the exception of Participant 15, all of them has a correlation above 0.5 with three participants closer to 0.8 than 0.5.

The list of distinguishing statements of the Factor is fairly long, but immediately, the statements paint an illustration of a particular type of Conservative party voter.

Statements 20, 31, 29, 4, 16, 17, 18, and 30 all lie in a sphere of agreement going from +5 for Statement 20, with the remaining statements gradually

declining in agreement down to Statement 16 at +2. A quick glance at what these statements are inferring is intriguing to say the least.

These eight statements which distinguish the Factor overall, are all highly critical and often extremely harsh of the path that Theresa May and the General Election campaign had taken.

Statements 31,29,4 and 17 are directly critical of the campaign in general. The first three of these statements are more general in their critique of the Tory party. A weakness with respect to Brexit, as well as on pensions are key criticisms which have found agreement amongst participants who loaded highly on the Factor. Problems with the Tory Manifesto, and the fact that Brexit was not being used as a dynamic force by the party are key focuses of the criticism.

Statement 17 is more unique and is a direct barb at whoever organised the Conservative campaign and specifically mentions the other key aspect of agreement among the positive distinguishing statements, which is the problem of Theresa May herself.

Statements 20 (which scored a + 5) as well as 18 and 30 (which both scored +2) are more direct in their attacks on Mrs May. Statement 20 compares her to an inept racing driver who had botched the race in a potentially winning car, whilst Statement 18 is an outright personal attack on the Prime Minister, calling her out for a perceived personal flaw. Statement 30 merely covers the fact that Mrs May needed to call a press conference (albeit one that she had in many ways forced upon herself as the statement subtly implies) and is comparatively kinder to the Prime Minister.

The more neutral statements, or ones with only slight disagreement, hardly make for more joyful reading for those Conservatives who supported or liked Theresa May.

Statement 16 viewed neutrally argues that the label of “Nasty Party” has not yet been shrugged off the Conservative party’s shoulders. Considering this statement was ranked in the neutral zone by a Conservative party reader is a further sign of what is to come.

Corbyn’s leadership as weak or incompetent (as discussed in Statement 1) is not particularly disagreed with or agreed with and also lies within the neutral

zone which seems high considering that Corbyn is the natural opposition to a Tory voter.

The two statements at -1 (Statements 3 and 11) are also statements that one would expect to be ranked differently as once again a compliment is offered to Corbyn and an insult to May.

At this point, in analysing the distinguishing Statement of the Factor, it becomes clear what the main thrust is behind this particular Factor. It is that as bad as Corbyn might be (which placement of factors such as 34 would indicate is still a dominant attitude), Theresa May is viewed as the leader who ran the more inept campaign.

The remaining distinguishing statements which were “disagreed with” further bear this out. The following three Statements (37, 36 and 25) are all attacks on Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour campaign and are disagreed with by the Participant who loaded onto the Factor.

However, it is the final four Statements of 39,48,42 and 41 which complete the picture painted in the Q-Sort.

All four of these statements significantly praise Theresa May in some way. Whether they are statements arguing that May had “youth appeal” to praising her over her handling of Brexit and the potential to get what she wants from Brussels, all these statements are unambiguously positive in their praise of the Prime Minister and of the Conservative party. It is these personalised messages that are so vehemently disagreed with by those who loaded onto this Factor.

At this point it should be noted that whilst Participant 15 does load onto the Factor, they load on far weaker than other participants in the group.

A quick glance at the Q-Sort itself quickly shows the degree to which Participant 15 affiliates with the Factor.

Table 6.7 Q-Sort of Participant 15

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
Participant 15	-1	1	2	1	1	-1	-2	0	1	1	-4	3
	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24
Participant 15	-1	-3	-1	0	4	3	-1	3	0	2	0	-4
	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36
Participant 15	-4	2	-2	0	0	-2	5	4	3	-3	1	-1
	S37	S38	S39	S40	S41	S42	S43	S44	S45	S46	S47	S48
Participant 15	4	2	0	-3	-5	-5	0	-2	5	-3	2	-2

Statement 30 is on an opposite point of agreement to where it would be in the Factor 1 set and Statement 29 is loaded as neutral but otherwise the other statements in agreement are on the correct side of the board.

Statement 16 is where we would expect it to be compared to the composite Q-Sort while Statement 1 is a notch lower at -1 than the 0 that would be expected.

Statements 11 and 3 are somewhat different than would be expected with Statement 3 being further up the matrix and Statement 11 being much further down. Given that correlation was fairly weak for Participant 15 though, this isn't too surprising.

The presence of Statements 36 and 25 aren't too anomalous, but Statement 37's presence near the most "agreed with" end of the matrix clearly helps to account for why there is a lower correlation with Factor 1 despite it being the Factor Participant 15 loaded onto.

Statement 39 with its presence in the neutral zone is higher than expected, as is Statement 48, but as these don't dip into the agreement side of the matrix the difference isn't too severe.

The presence of Statements 41 and 42 at the far left on the disagreement side of the matrix solidifies the Q-Sort and explains why it correlated most highly with Factor 1.

Factor 1 is therefore very highly biased against Theresa May. Many of the most extreme attitudes in the Q-Sort are against the Prime Minister and how poorly she had campaigned in the General Election. Participants who loaded heavily onto this Factor were highly critical of the Prime Minister and this was certainly reflected in their answers.

Participant 6, for example, was still irate at how the campaign had been handled by the Conservatives when asked about how well the newsprint analysis was reflected in the Q-Sort.

“The coverage represented is almost too accurate. It reflects how bad the whole thing ended up being. The Tory campaign was laughably incompetent. With the attack on elderly voters and the hiding away of May, it was almost like they were trying to lose. Then, on the occasions they did let May speak, she ended up being turned into memes that damaged the campaign further.”

Participant 8 was equally uncharitable.

“Obviously Corbyn is a communist mad man and should never be Prime Minister if the country wants to survive, but somehow the Tory campaign made him look sensible in comparison which looked impossible in the months leading up to the election. I mean Corbyn as the sensible option. It's insane!”

All the other Participants who loaded onto the Factor were still begrudgingly supportive of the Conservative party (dislike of Jeremy Corbyn was still prevalent among the sample, if not as extreme as other Factors) and the Conservative party was still the reluctant choice in the event of another snap election. However, as this Q-Sort analysis took place before the Brexit Party was inaugurated or had become a significant force, this answer may well have changed in the time that has since elapsed. I have therefore named this Factor as the “**Exasperated Conservative Voter**”.

Factor 2: The Loyalist Conservative Voter

Factor 2 was significantly different from Factor 1. In contrast to the former's lack of support for Theresa May and begrudging acknowledgment of Jeremy Corbyn as a poor leader who had run the better campaign, Factor 2 was truly partisan in the viewings of the Labour Campaign and how the Conservative campaign had been run. Factor 2 is pictured below.

Composite Q sort for Factor 2

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
7	18	8	13	35	25	44	1	46	24	39
3	17	2	5	26	31	27	15	38	47	48
	6	33	19	28	21	37	43	12	34	
		22	40	9	32	36	41	11		
			20	16	30	42	10			
				14	29	45				
					23					
						4				

Figure 6.8

As can immediately be seen, the matrix for this factor is significantly different to that of Factor 1 and it becomes blatantly clear when looking at the distinguishing statements for this Factor, that the focus of the Participants who loaded onto this Factor (Participants 4,7,10 and 12) are very different to those of the Participants who loaded onto Factor 1. The first five distinguishing

statements (Statements 39,48,24,12 and 11) indicate the primary difference of this Factor in comparison to the last one.

These statements all indicate an admiration or support of Theresa May.

All these statements argue that Theresa May is the more competent leader, and is in fact the more appealing option, when compared to Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party. Statements such as 39,48 and 24 argue this point strongly and ranked very highly for this Factor.

The Participants who loaded onto this Factor therefore believe in Mrs May and believe in what she was doing with the Conservative campaign. This puts them in almost direct contrast with Factor 1 who thought the exact opposite.

The comparison of where the first three distinguishing statements of Factor 2 are in comparison to Factor 1 is startling.

Statements 39 and 48 are the two most “agreed with” statements for Factor 2 both at +5 and Statement 24 isn’t much further behind at + 4.

For Factor 1, all three are ranked at -4.

In other words, Factor 2’s loading of the statements is almost the exact opposite of these three statements than Factor 1, indicating the key aspect of this Voter type which was loyalty to May’s version of the Conservative party.

Statements 12 and 11 with their broader support for May’s direction for the Conservative party (both ranked at +3) were less vehemently opposed by Factor 1, with slight agreement for Statement 12 and slight disagreement for Statement 11.

Of the 7 other distinguishing statements, in their order of declining agreement, Statements 15, 43, 41, 44, 27, 37, and 42 provide a variety of things to take away.

Statements 43 and 44 were not significantly different and hence not noteworthy. Statement 15, with its moderate (+2) agreement with, which floated the idea that the Election results were already written on the wall, is opposed by Factor 1 with moderate disagreement at (-2), indicating a gulf in expectations among Factors.

However, Statement 41, with its moderate agreement (+2) that Mrs May had done well in Europe, is disagreed with in the strongest possible terms (+5) by Factor 1. Again, this is symptomatic of the Factor's key difference in its support of Theresa May when Factor 1 is so opposed to her.

Statements 27 and 37 with their slight support of Corbyn's campaign going badly are disagreed with in significant terms (-3) by Factor 1.

Once again Statement 42 brings the key difference of the Factor to bear with the slight support for the statement given (+1) and which was vehemently opposed by Factor 1 again (-5)

All of this continues to bring to the forefront just how badly Theresa May is thought of by Factor 1 in comparison to how well she is thought of by Factor 2. The agreement with Factor 2 of the pro-May position is almost completely at odds with that of Factor 1, even if they do have some areas of agreement.

This loyalty to the Prime Minister continues in the latter half of the distinguishing Statements which were in disagreement (in declining order from least disagreed to most 26, 28, 13, 5, 2, 33, 6, 7 and 3).

Straight away Statement 26, which deals with the possibility of the Tory campaign facing backlash to the "dementia tax" is shown to be in disagreement with its placing at -1 as is Statement 28 which deals with the possibility of the election also ranked at -1)

The next two Statements which disparage Theresa May (13 and 5) are met with further disagreement as would be expected.

The next two Statements (2 and 33) are more interesting and introduce the second more subdued aspect to Factor 2. These statements complement Corbyn's campaign and suggest the possibility that the election was not as clear cut as might initially have been expected.

These statements were treated very differently by Factor 1. Statement 2 which directly implied an increased turnout was treated neutrally by the Factor. On the other hand, Statement 33 which entertained the possibility that Corbyn could potentially win was met with significant agreement (+3) by Factor 1.

Factor 2 on the other hand disbelieved both just as significantly scoring both at (-3).

The above illustrates the other key aspect of Factor 2 – strong hostility to Corbyn.

Just as much as those who loaded onto the Factor are loyal to Theresa May and believe she is doing little wrong, they can also not bring themselves to believe that Jeremy Corbyn is in any way competent or capable of winning an election.

The final three statements bring in aspects of both Factors 1 and 2.

Statements 6,7 and 3 are some of the most disagreed with by the Factor out of all the statements. Statements 7 and 3 both scoring at -5 with Statement 6 on -4.

Statements 6 and 7 directly deal with the personality features of the two leaders. Corbyn is implied to have a distinct personality whilst Theresa May is referred to as a Maybot. These statements both met with a comparatively neutral reaction by Factor 1 (Statement 6 with its critique of Theresa May placed at +1 whilst Statement 7 which is complimentary of Jeremy Corbyn at -2, although considering 7 is a statement outright praising Corbyn, it is still a muted reaction for a member of an opposing party). Factor 2 on the other hand disagrees most strongly with these out of any statements placing both at -5.

Finally, we come to Statement 3 which perhaps encapsulates the best combination of the two significant aspects to the Factor which is the idea of Jeremy Corbyn having a good campaign. In line with what is to be expected, this is disagreed with by Factor 2 and would probably be considered a laughable suggestion by those who loaded onto the Factor. The response of those who loaded onto Factor 2 is significantly contrasted by those of Factor 1. However much those participants in Factor 1 disliked Corbyn (which they did) they also believed that he had made good decisions which had led to a strong campaign.

The attitudes of those within Factor 2 I have chosen to refer to as “Loyalist Conservative Voters” as they were loyal to how the campaign went and to the Prime Minister herself.

The questionnaires revealed answers and information which went some way to explain the loyalty.

Participant 7, for example, expressed significant exasperation in their answer to the question of the media campaigns around future elections (q3) by discussing what had happened in this one.

“I hope future election campaigns aren’t like how the media treated this one. It seemed like nearly all the papers ganged up on May. Considering that she was calling the election to get more support for Brexit it was foolish and damaged our chances. Corbyn didn’t run a good campaign, it was the media who nearly handed him the win on a silver platter.”

Participant 12 also defended May and how the Conservative campaign had been run expressing distaste for the direction the party seemed to be going.

“I don’t want another election soon. With how the party’s treated the deal so far, it seems a sure thing now though. Corbyn is still an idiot with no understanding of how things work but he seemed to fool a lot of people the last time and I don’t want to give him a chance to try again. I still think May would have won if so many people didn’t keep on stabbing her in the back as 2017 wasn’t as bad a job as a lot of people think.”

Most of the participants who loaded onto Factor 2 expressed concern with the direction the party was heading and many were supportive of May’s Deal, although some expressed reservations about whether it was capable of unifying the country as much as they would like.

Factor 3: The Realistic Conservative Voter

Factor 3 was the final factor that participants loaded onto and once again, it is very different from the other two Factors as seen below

Composite Q sort for Factor 3

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
24	15	22	18	42	10	12	25	47	34	40
11	45	7	14	23	8	13	1	37	46	32
	21	17	30	43	19	26	28	38	33	
		16	27	44	4	2	35	5		
			3	20	6	29	36			
				48	31	39				
					9					
					41					

Figure 6.9

Factor 3 is perhaps the most intriguing of all the Factors as it in many ways gives the most respect to Jeremy Corbyn and it is clear from a quick look at the distinguishing statements just what makes this Factor different.

As opposed to Factor 1, Factor 3 did not solely blame Theresa May for the failure of the campaign, but unlike Factor 2, it did not believe Mrs May had, by any means, led a blameless campaign.

An exploration of the distinguishing Statements (40, 32,37,35,39, 41,42,48,3,45,21 and 11) emphasises these differences.

Straight away, the strongest “agreed with” Statements (40 and 32) begin to paint this picture. Both statements lend significant weight to the monopolisation of the Youth Vote by the Labour campaign. These statements scores are disagreed with equally by both Factors 1 and 2 who rank Statement 40 with moderate (-2) disagreement and Statement 32 with neutrality (0).

As we move further down in reading the list of distinguished statements, it becomes clear that three statements still remain separate to the rest.

Statement 37 emphasized Corbyn doing poorly on Brexit, an issue where Factor 3 believed Corbyn had done “chaotically”. This was disagreed with by Factor 1 significantly (-3) although Factor 2 did have some slight agreement (+1) with this.

Of far more interest is Statement 35, which is outright complimentary towards Corbyn about concealing his extremism. Here both Factors 1 and 2 disagreed at -1 and -2 respectively. This is very different from the +2 that Factor 3 gives this statement and is another example of the key difference in Factor 3’s belief that Corbyn was a threat even had all other things remained equal.

The next four distinguishing statements indicate Factor 3’s relative neutrality on the issue of Theresa May as an effective leader in comparison to the more combative Factors 1 and 2 who both held more polarised views on her competence. Statements 39, 41, 42 and 48 are all ranked relatively close to a neutral point by Factor 3 (ranging from +1 to -1), whereas on the other hand, these statements are major sources of contention for Factors 1 and 2 and go some way to explaining the large differences between those two Factors.

As an example, Statement 39 is ranked at +1 for Factor 3, indicating just slight agreement. However, this statement is of great importance to Factor 1 and Factor 2 ranking at -5 for the former and at +4 for the latter.

The following three statements show a similar pattern of relative neutrality by Factor 3 whilst being of great significance to both of the other Factors at different ends of the Matrix.

The final four statements are more eclectic as they move out of the more neutral area of the board.

Statement 3 about Jeremy Corbyn running a good campaign is ranked at -2. This is not wholly dissimilar to the way that Factor 1 ranks the same statement, but it is far less extreme than Factor 2 who ranks it at -5.

Statement 45 also reveals something significant about this Factor as it emphasizes the importance of Brexit on the election.

The difference here is a relatively stark one. Both Factors 1 and 2 agree with this point if only slightly (+1) while Factor 3 disagrees with it strongly (-4). This is a significant difference and helps to build on the other key point about Factor 3

Unlike the other Factors, Brexit is not viewed by this Factor as particularly relevant to the election and its result. Unlike the other two Factors, Factor 3 was never sure that victory was assured.

This is further emphasized by its significant placing of Statement 21, which argued that the Conservatives were always going to win. Factor 3 disagreed with this and clearly didn't underestimate Labour before the election campaign.

Factor 3 was also sceptical of the political realignment that May sought and didn't think she had engaged with "Clever Politics" as noted in Statement 11. Given that Factor 3 was pessimistic on the chances of the Conservatives in the Election in the first place, it isn't surprising they disagreed that May had acted foolishly in calling the election.

This is reflected in the attitudes of the participants as indicated by their questionnaire answers.

Participant C, for example, was pessimistic of both the main parties after this election, specifically on their competence as was illustrated with their answer to the final question on who they'd vote for next time

"Spoilt ballot. The biggest parties are incompetent. Send a message to this government. Needs to be stopped"

An additional remark on potential further action to take was written down and then crossed out (though still legible) by Participant C possibly due to its call for the incitement of a more violent protest.

Participant A was more measured than Participant C, but still had important points to reflect on about the situation, particularly with regards to how media coverage of the situation might be improved.

“The Print media should rely less on general stereotypes of the parties and their leaders e.g. “The Nasty Party” and “Communist Corbyn”. These make it harder to take campaigns at face value and I think these stereotypes distort reality and lead to ‘shocks’ like in the 2017 election.”

This more measured perspective is similar to that found in line with Factor 3 in that the broader stereotypes and polarised nature of the campaign didn’t seem to be bought into as much.

Due to the fact that this Factor type seemed to have the best grasp of the realities of the campaign, I have named this Factor as the “**Realistic Conservative Voter**”.

At this point, it should be noted that some participants of the Q-Sorts did not directly load onto a particular Factor.

These anomalies will be explored now.

Firstly, Participant 13 did not load onto any Factor with anything close to significance. A quick look at its Q-Sort reveals why.

Table 6.8 Q-Sort of Participant 13

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
Participant 13	-2	1	0	1	3	-1	-5	2	4	3	5	4
	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24
Participant 13	0	2	-1	-1	-4	-1	0	1	-1	4	3	5
	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36
Participant 13	-2	1	-4	1	2	0	2	-1	-3	0	-3	-2
	S37	S38	S39	S40	S41	S42	S43	S44	S45	S46	S47	S48
Participant 13	-4	0	0	3	-3	-2	-3	-2	-5	0	2	1

Participant 13 is significantly different to the other Participants. The difference and the reason why it loads so low in comparison to the other Factors is apparent just from looking at the picture of the top 5 highest “agreed with” statements and the bottom five lowest “agreed with” statements.

Amongst the top five are Statements 24,11,12,9 and 22.

Of these five statements, three (Statements 24, 11 and 12) are highly complimentary of Theresa May but the other two, however, are just as complimentary of Corbyn (Statements 22 and 9).

Of the bottom five statements on the other hand, four (Statements 7,37,27 and 17) were statements which were particularly negative about both campaigns.

A look through the whole Q-Sort paints the picture of a very different Conservative voter who was neutral on statements such as those about Corbyn and terrorist links and overall seemed to be less extreme.

Participant 13 believed that Corbyn stood a chance and thought he was an economic danger but disagreed with how Corbyn was often portrayed and the emphasis on terrorist links which Participant 13 said were “played up”.

Perhaps Participant 13 and their views would best be described in the answer Participant 13 provided to question 2.

“The Debate wasn’t civil which was disappointing. Corbyn was once again turned into a bogeyman by papers like the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* for his links with suspect groups, which are true but not particularly relevant in many respects and seem to be exaggerated. Corbyn is dangerous for his economic policies but he ran a good campaign. I think that both parties ran better campaigns than might initially be thought actually and Theresa May’s campaign did seem to improve after the fuel payment gaffe”.

This respect for both campaigns, as well as the dismissal of many of the more polarised elements of the discourse, put Participant 13 in an unusual position of neutrality in comparison to the polarised factors of 1,2 and 3.

As a result of Participant 13’s “level headedness” and generous attitude to both sides of the debate, despite voting Conservative they failed to correlate particularly strongly with any of the Factors.

Participant 9 on the other hand was not in quite the same situation. Unlike Participant 13, Participant 9 was on the borderline at being flagged for correlating with not just one but two Factors. Their situation is a more complex one because unlike Participant 13, elements of Factors 1 and 3 are present in the Q-Sort.

Table 6.9 Q-Sort of Participant 9

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
Participant 9	1	2	-1	3	4	0	-3	0	-4	0	-4	-4
	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24
Participant 9	-1	-2	-5	5	2	3	0	2	-2	-1	1	0
	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36
Participant 9	1	1	0	4	1	2	-5	-1	5	1	-3	0
	S37	S38	S39	S40	S41	S42	S43	S44	S45	S46	S47	S48
Participant 9	3	3	0	-2	-3	-1	-2	-2	-1	2	4	-3

An initial glance at Participant 9's data reveals the reason why this Participant was fairly split whilst also not correlating particularly highly with any particular Factor.

Factor 2 and its positive portrayal of Theresa May was not reflecting in this Factor and if anything, was "disagreed with" though not enough to have any sufficient statistical bearing. The correlation with both Factors 1 and 3 were slightly more significant and this is reflected in Participant 9's Q-Sort which does have several of the distinguishing statements close to where they would be for Factor 1 at times and the same for Factor 3.

Ultimately however, Participant 9 doesn't really correlate strongly enough with either Factor 1 which was fairly bleak about Theresa May or Factor 3 which was fairly bullish about how Jeremy Corbyn had fared.

Participant 9 was ultimately displeased with Jeremy Corbyn, displeased with Theresa May and displeased with both campaigns in general and the discourse reflects this. Participant 9's questionnaire reflects this displeasure.

Participant 9 states the following about the campaigns.

“Both campaigns were petty and enjoyed using buzzwords and insults in an attempt to create banterous propaganda, however this makes them sound unintelligent”.

Participant 9 felt that this was reflected in the discourse and expressed their displeasure with both sides of the debate much like Participant 3.

“Another election after that mess. I'll abstain thanks.”

By comparison, Participant 14 loaded more significantly onto two Factors in a similar manner to Participant H from the Brexit Q-Sorts.

Looking at Participant 14's Q-Sort shows us immediately why it loaded quite significantly onto Factor 1.

Table 6.10 Q-Sort of Participant 14

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
Participant 14	0	0	-1	3	2	0	-1	2	2	-4	-1	-2
	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24
Participant 14	2	-3	-3	2	4	1	-2	1	-3	1	0	-3
	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36
Participant 14	-2	1	-2	1	1	0	0	0	5	5	3	-1
	S37	S38	S39	S40	S41	S42	S43	S44	S45	S46	S47	S48
Participant 14	3	4	-5	0	-5	-1	-2	-4	3	4	-1	-4

An immediate comparison with Factor 1 indicates why Participant 14 would have a high correlation with this Factor.

Of the 18 distinguishing statements of Factor 1, Participant 14 correlates exactly with 6 of them and within 2 columns with another 8.

It is easy at once to see why Factor 1 might show a correlation. Agreeing with so many of the key distinguishing statements and being within a small gap of many more indicates at least a somewhat significant correlation.

Looking at Factor 3 and why Participant 14 might correlate with it is slightly more difficult. Of the 12 distinguishing statements of Factor 3, Participant 14 only correlates directly with two of them and only another 3 within 2 columns.

However, looking at the further Q-Sort outside of the distinguishing statements reveals that Participant 14 directly correlates with 9 statements of the Factor 3 general Q-Sort and is within 2 columns of a further 21 with 13 of those only being separated by one column.

This agreement with the rest of the standard Q-Sort outside of the distinguishing statements goes some way to show why the Statement may load onto Factor 3 as well although it is much less obvious why at first in comparison to its loading onto Factor 1 because despite a similar level of correlation, it seems far more suited to 1 at first glance than 3.

Across all these Q-Sorts there were some statements whose narrative was agreed with by all three Factors (see table below)

Table 6.11 Consensus statements for Brexit Q-Sorts

Statement Number	factor1 Q-SV	factor2 Q-SV	factor3 Q-SV
8	-1	-3	0
9	0	-1	0
14	-1	-1	-2
23	-1	0	-1
34	5	4	4
38	3	3	3
46	4	3	4
47	5	4	3

Statement 8 about Jeremy Corbyn having a good campaign was generally regarded neutrally, leaning into “slight disagreement” with Factor 2 having a strong opinion at -3. This was the widest range of agreement among the consensus factors.

Statement 9 about Labour’s campaign being strategic was regarded neutrally, with only Factor 2 showing minor disagreement with the statement.

Statement 14 about May shifting position because of the dementia tax, was slightly too moderately “disagreed with” by all with Factor 3 at -2 and Factors 1 and 2 at -1.

Statement 23 regarding Corbyn’s progress in the election was slightly disagreed with (-1) by both Factors 1 and 3 and treated neutrally by Factor 2 (0).

Statement 34 about Corbyn being a terrorist sympathizer and supporter was strongly agreed with by all, with Factor 2 and Factor 3 ranking at +4 and Factor 1 at +5

Statement 38 about Marx being the only intellectual of any significant interest to Mr Corbyn was significantly agreed with at +3 by all three Factors.

Statement 46 once again about Corbyn being a terrorist sympathizer met with a range of agreement from the strong agreement of Factors 1 and 3 at +4 and significant agreement of Factor 2 at +3.

Statement 47 about a Labour government leading to chaos met with the strongest possible agreement (+5) by Factor 1, strong agreement (+4) by Factor 2 and significant agreement (+3) by Factor 3.

These statements in consensus paint a final picture of all participants and the discourse as a whole. Although there may be many disagreements amongst the three Factors, what can be agreed upon by all three is that Corbyn is a communist (shared agreement of +3 with Statement 38), terrorist sympathizer (shared agreement ranging between +4 and +5 for statement 34), whose election to power would lead to chaos (average agreement of +4 for Statement 47 ranging from +3 for Factor 3 to the strongest possible agreement for Factor 1 with a +4 for Factor 2). Immediately therefore, despite the many differences between the Factors and even the begrudging neutrality or agreement some Factors expressed towards the chance of a Corbyn leadership, the Labour leader was still seen as a threat to prosperity and values of decency by all three Factors.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study, compare those findings with the Literature studied and see how this all fits with the research questions and original hypotheses.

Research findings: Comparison with the literature

When this research was initially undertaken, the purpose and idea behind it seemed a comparatively simple one. It was to investigate the degree to which Media portrayals of each side in a debate lined up with what voters from a particular group (in this case active university students) voted for with respect to the winning party or Referendum vote. The target group in this case had gone against the grain of the majority of their peers having voted for Brexit during the Referendum and/or Conservative during the most recent General Election of 2017.

These initial thoughts and aims were summed up in the primary research question:

RQ 1: Do media portrayals of sides in a debate exaggerate political conflict and do research participants think that they exacerbate it?

This was then followed by additional sub-research questions to help answer this. These questions were as follows:

RQ 2: Are Leave voters in the Brexit Referendum and Conservative Party General Election voters more nuanced in their political positions and values than media portrayals imply?

RQ 3: Has the media successfully turned opinion on different sides into truths in the eyes of their target audience? To what extent do research participants treat media opinion as truth?

Initially a variety of hypotheses were made on the subject to help answer the questions and these were as follows:

1. Not all Conservative Party or Leave voters agree with many key Leave/Conservative policy issues.

2. Both Conservative Party and Leave voters will agree with media portrayals of left-behind voters.

3. Both Conservative Party and Leave voters will hold strong views on caricaturised portrayals of voters and Parties from both their side and the losing side.

From this starting point an exploration of research considered particularly relevant to young voters and the overall composition and influence of the mainstream newsprint media was explored.

During initial investigations of relevant literature, it was immediately clear that certain aspects of the research questions could meet with intriguing results. The work of Startin in both his solo 2015 article and 2013 collaboration with Usherwood were eye opening in exploring just how significant and pervasive the attitudes against the European Union had become in much of the right-wing newsprint media. From these initial articles it appeared that the idea that the issue of political conflict being exaggerated was one that was likely to be confirmed, to a degree, for those who voted for Brexit. The additional work supplied by others (such as Startin) during the Brexit Referendum gave further credence to this initial view. Khabaz's analysis (2018) of the discourses present in the Brexit Referendum supported the ideas which Startin had originally put forth. Immediately, the patterns of how the Brexit discourse was likely to take shape and the conflicts that could occur from this began to form. With a media which had been confirmed as significantly Leave-leaning and unrepresentative of opposing opinion, the possibility that there could be significant conflict between positions with regard to Brexit was a realistic one.

In addition, the coalescing of much of the press around the more extreme Eurosceptic positions advocated by the *Daily Express* during the Referendum campaign meant that there was little in the way of nuance amongst most of the right-wing press at the time. Once the *Daily Express* had staked out its territory, the Brexit positions of the other newspapers became more hard-line in the lead up to the vote. Eurosceptic positions on some of the EU Institutions had turned into a hostile attitude in many quarters regarding anything associated with the European project. This in many ways helped in fostering the underdog spirit that

Bosetta et al found in 2016 and a theory that the establishment elite was out to scupper British interests came to the forefront.

The fact that so much of the agenda during the Referendum was led by the Leave campaign is also clear. If, as researchers, we are dealing with opinions on an issue being turned into direct truths in the eyes of their target audiences then we need look no further than the significantly corrupted debate around immigration. The fact that it is always the “issue” of immigration referred to throughout the mass media (immediately insinuating that immigration is a problem) is in many ways incredibly concerning. The fact that significant levels of immigration are a fundamental requirement in this country for the survival of many industries and services (such as in the health sector (NHS) and elderly care sectors) and are critical for the continued wellbeing of the UK’s population, was almost entirely overlooked in the run up to the Referendum. Immigration was simply presented as an “issue” in the Referendum as Goodwin et al (2017) noted and there was little nuance of debate in this subject from what can be seen from much of the literature of the period.

In many ways, articles written prior to the 2017 General Election showed signs of conflict on a party-political basis were already occurring. Signs of what was about to come were lurking in many of the articles studied in both Chapters 2 and 3. The fact that Jeremy Corbyn may not have been quite as popular amongst the young as the mainstream media might suggest was clear after the work performed by Dorey and Denham (2016). Additionally, the fact that Corbyn was treated poorly in the Press is an understatement with regards to further literature concerning the Labour party leader. As Cammaerts (2016) noted, narratives of Corbyn as associated with terrorism had already taken route as a discourse prior to the 2017 General Election. However, the news media went further with this. Fuchs (2016) noted that the portrayal of Corbyn’s ideals and politics as dangerously left-wing and associated with Marxist ideology was another key narrative which sprung up about the Labour leader around this time.

In contrast, the treatment of Theresa May before the 2017 General Election was significantly kinder in that it was mostly absent. At this point, the project of Brexit was of far more importance than the person who was bringing the process about (although there were grumbles in the press of a Remain-aligned MP

suddenly seeing “the light”). This absence of any particular kind of coverage amongst much of the media before the 2017 election left a serious vacuum compared to the large amount of coverage that Jeremy Corbyn experienced. Much of the press was significantly more focused on Corbyn’s many faults and the stability of his position rather than giving significant thought to the leader of the actual Government.

Using the information gleaned from the literature, there were some logical assumptions to make with regards to the research questions. Given the high level of toxicity witnessed regarding Brexit and against Jeremy Corbyn, it was not unreasonable to assume that there was significant exaggeration for the purposes of political conflict. Much of the press had a Eurosceptic agenda that would lend itself to exaggeration on the issue of Brexit as well as a dislike of many of Corbyn’s politics and policies which would also lend itself to exaggeration.

Nuance in positions was not particularly well represented amongst the Brexit-supporting media. As previously mentioned, much of the press had been entrenched in a Eurosceptic attitude for years and there was a general zeal in support of the Leave vote which was unlikely to be hampered by things as unimportant to them as experts who disagreed with them (although those that did so were often portrayed as wise and their proclamations treated as factual in the run up to the Referendum vote). The general attitude of the right-wing press did not give much room for nuance so initial assumptions with regards to young Brexit voters echoed this.

Amongst the Conservative press, the hatred for Corbyn was pretty universal. Unlike Ed Miliband who could occasionally be viewed favourably, Corbyn was labelled as both a Marxist and a terrorist sympathizer and was nearly always painted as dangerous either economically or to National Security.

In both cases there was little allowance for nuance among media portrayals of sides and key figures and initial assumptions were that voters were likely to be treated in the same way. However, given the wide spread of views found amongst young voters, it was felt that the voters themselves might have a wide range of views compared to media portrayals.

Looking at the media coverage at the time, it was clear that opinions in the British Press were well on their way to being portrayed or treated as facts by the papers. By the time the 2017 General Election took place, the general idea that Corbyn was electable to any significant degree had been discarded as a complete fantasy. This attitude continued to persist up to and including the announcement of the General Election.

As already mentioned, the debate on immigration had already transformed the opinion that immigration was bad into a commonly agreed upon fact long before the Referendum legislation was even put before parliament.

At this point in the research, having analysed the literature around media without focusing on the specifics during the Referendum period itself, I was confident in the strength of the research questions and I was confident that my three hypotheses would not be disproven.

The only hypothesis which left me with some concern at the time was the second hypothesis around left-behind voters. This hypothesis had been included due to the strength of the overall feeling around voters who had been ignored in the immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote. However, narratives around these voters were not easily found outside of the press itself even in the aftermath of the vote although its presence in the press was a significant discourse.

Findings: Discourse Network Analyser

As the first step of the project was undertaken in the aftermath of the literature review, the sheer scale and scope of the discourses for both the Brexit Referendum and the General Election campaign were immediately obvious. The coverage around the Brexit campaign was in some respects disheartening being close to what had initially been suspected. Most of the Leave papers had acted in a manner which was to be expected but it required a closer look at the specific coverage to ascertain this. Initial glances at the discourse seemed to show more interesting results such as much of the Leave-leaning press reporting on the EU as a force for democracy or the Remain-leaning press reporting on Project Fear proved to be in many ways misleading.

What had occurred in these cases, which seemed more anomalous, were the reporting of various actors who had shared those beliefs. The *Daily Express* reporting on Remain figures or *The Guardian* reporting on a number of Leave figures went some way to explain much of what occurred in the crossing of narratives amongst the press in the case of Brexit.

In this respect, the Brexit discourse was very much as initially assumed although there were some interesting nuggets within which showed the discourse was not wholly as expected as is explored in that chapter. These nuggets were rare though amongst the Leave-leaning press and only those examples covered in that chapter were easily observable.

The Remain-leaning media as mentioned in the DNA chapter wove a more complex tale, but this in many respects ties in with some of the attitudes perpetuated by the Leave-leaning press that have become near orthodoxy as accurate regardless of whether or not they are, such as attitudes about immigration. The idea of left-behind voters and the problems that immigration might cause were clearly accepted by *The Guardian* as truth even if they may have had more nuance on the topic than in the Leave-leaning media.

Arguments against the stereotyping of Leave voters were also present in the Remain-leaning press arguing against the common stereotypes that the campaigns had undergone yet these were often lone voices amongst the Brexit debate.

What is clear from the discourse network analysis of the Referendum debate is that Brexit was very nearly as polarised as is commonly portrayed. Overlap was minimal and with only a few exceptions, it would be easy to guess a paper's stance from only a few lines of any particular article. This was similar to what had been theorised originally at the beginning of the project. As evidence for the hypothesis at this stage with regards to the Brexit debate, an exaggeration of the conflict between the two sides couldn't yet be ruled out. There was a significant level of acrimony in some of the articles and the overall tone of the debate could at times be tempestuous as the statements' Q-Sorts go some way towards demonstrating. Of importance in the debates around Brexit is that the media does have some degree of focus on left-behind voters during the Brexit debate and the focus on this point was reported in at least *The Daily Telegraph*

and the *Daily Mail* although it wasn't one of the most significant narratives present.

The Brexit debate therefore lined up significantly with initial expectations. What did not however, was the 2017 General Election debate which in contrast was far more chaotic and went against expectations.

From an initial read of the chapter on the discourse network analysis that covers the election, it is immediately clear that the discourse was divided and that narratives were all over the place.

Unlike the odd example that occurred in the Brexit discourse, the comparative oddities in the General Election discourse were not so much rare outliers but a significant chunk of the debate.

In looking at the discourse it is immediately clear that something went very wrong for the Conservative campaign and very right by comparison for the Labour campaign. Statements supportive of the Labour campaign, whether couched in terms of begrudging respect or a sickened admiration borne of despair, were certainly present in the Conservative-leaning press. So too in the press were damnations over how Theresa May and the Conservative party were performing during the campaign from newspapers that were inclined to be supportive and many of whom seemed desperate to attempt to salvage some sort of face from a campaign that had wide consensus across the spectrum of papers as disastrous due to a series of significant blunders on behalf of the Conservative Party.

Theresa May came in for some significant criticism from media outlets that would have been traditionally supportive of the Conservatives. Concepts such as May as robotic, which were well represented and covered as long-standing critiques by the Left, were in many respects borrowed by figures in areas of the Press where normally praise would be the expectation and a position of comparative neutrality expected at the most extreme. Instead, Theresa May was subject to significant personal attacks on how she presented herself and her personal style of campaigning

The Conservative Party itself did not come out unscathed from such critiques but the tendency to shift the blame on to May was particularly noteworthy

amongst the articles sampled and the discourses in general. In an ironic twist of fate, one of the beneficiaries of this was Jeremy Corbyn who, while consistently personally insulted by many of these papers and still portrayed as a terrorist sympathizing Marxist who would destroy the economy, was nevertheless damned by the faintest of praises for some of his actions in campaigning whilst occasionally being praised outright, even if he was often portrayed as the villain (Corbyn) winning in a battle against a weakened hero (May).

That is not to say that the Labour-leaning media did not engage in its own battles against the figure it was more likely to support. Corbyn was subtly disparaged by several articles, as was Labour's strategy, and there was little expectation that Corbyn would do well in significant portions of the media's coverage. Although never as bad as the attacks on May, there was no complete unification around Corbyn as many of his problems as a candidate were still given free airing in the relevant papers.

The topsy-turvy coverage that this represented was not something which had been anticipated to any great degree from an analysis of the literature beforehand and there isn't any historical precedent in immediate memory. The fact that the Conservative-leaning press on numerous occasions began to tear into their own candidate whilst leaving the opposition candidate fairly unscathed, except for their usual criticism, was a unique scenario.

With regards to initial assumptions made, the discourses around the General Election had little acknowledgment of left-behind voters in the various articles covered. This occurred to such an extent that they were not included as a category for Discourse Network Analyser for the General Election campaign. The complete absence of left-behind voters as a significant force after the focus on voters who had been neglected had made multiple appearance in the Brexit discourse was unexpected during the construction of the hypotheses.

On the issue of exaggeration of conflict, it is difficult to ascertain for sure the levels to which this occurred. Due to the chaotic nature of the media discourse, it was difficult to pick out who was against who by the time the discourse network analysis was complete. In a scenario where Corbyn was out-rightly praised by *The Sun* newspaper as a candidate who was having a good campaign and enjoying himself whilst May was praised for attempting to

dominate the centre ground by *The Independent*, it is unlikely anyone could claim with confidence from a position before the election unfolded that the discourse fell in line with their predictions. It is difficult to discern where conflict lies when the conflict is both internal and external within parties.

Findings: Q-Sort Methodology

After the variation in results obtained from the discourse network analysis, the results gathered from the participants of the Q-Sorts (and relevant questionnaires) raised even more questions.

At this point, whilst the foundations remained solid for the Referendum, (this was reflected in the Q-Sort which was comparatively simple to put together due to the relative polarisation of the papers studied performing as expected), when it came to compiling a Q-Sort on the General Election, this proved to be a far more complex activity. This was because feasible predictions on what participants might think with regards to the General Election were completely up in the air and this was reflected in the Q-Sort. An attempt to try and represent the scope of debate that was reflected in the papers was difficult to achieve but was eventually completed.

The four significant factors that were extracted for the Brexit Q-Sort proved to be different in many respects. There were significant levels of disagreement between all of them and very different sorts of Brexit voters were identified as is explored in that chapter.

All of the Brexit voter types encountered shared certain aspects which were similar. There was a belief that Brexit was the right way forward and more opted for a No Deal Brexit than the deal that had been negotiated by Theresa May. Regardless of their personal reasons for voting Brexit (which ranged from issues of sovereignty to economic issues related to immigration etc.) all remained comparatively confident in their choice and the idea of changing their mind to support Remain was an idea that did not have a positive reception with any particular participant who loaded positively onto one of the four significant factors identified.

The four types of Brexiteer identified are fundamental to understanding and answering the key questions behind this research.

(It should be noted that Participant J was the only participant who loaded onto a factor negatively and with Participant J's significantly more pro-European economic area version of Brexit, this advocated they are something of an anomaly within the participants especially as they alone would vote for Remain in a second Referendum. Statistically the presence of a participant such as J should be expected if polls of Leave voters who have changed their mind and would switch votes are to be taken seriously).

The Brexiteer types identified were as follows:

1. The Optimistic Brexiteer who very much believed in the sunlit uplands version of Brexit and who ranked statements about potential economic boons from Brexit, such as more money for the NHS, quite highly.

2. The Sovereignty Brexiteer who did not fully buy into many aspects of the Leave campaign, particularly the overly sunny economic benefits but who were fully prepared to sacrifice economic benefits of EU membership to preserve British sovereignty. This participant did not see a continued granting of EU membership.

3. The Dedicated Brexiteer who was contemptuous of both the Conservatives and Labour and had a far more entrenched view of why they wanted to Leave the EU than others. The fact they believe better arguments existed to represent the Leave campaign is a key aspect to this type of Brexiteer. They were the true believers for whom Leaving was a decision they made way back in the past before the Referendum campaign began in earnest.

4. The Disdainful Brexiteer who was particularly sceptical of the Remain campaign and the various threats it made. It had much in common with The Sovereignty Brexiteer and shared many of the same viewpoints as that type only it was even more sceptical of most of the Remain-leaning or Remain campaign associated arguments.

All four of these Brexit types aid us in answering the key questions of the research. The fact that there are four types of voters with clear distinguishing differences between them shows that the vote for Leave was not homogenous amongst young voters. Media portrayals that would have had all of these voters as anti-immigrant voters who wanted to have more money for the NHS would

be significantly out of luck. As is evidenced from the Q-Sorts gathered for many of the 15 voters, the NHS was a small or even irrelevant concern, with several not agreeing with the idea of an economic boon coming from Brexit as a likely possibility of leaving the European Union.

Amongst the four types of Brexit Voter types there were some consensus statements as mentioned in the relevant chapter. All the statements are interesting but what Statement 25 reveals is an example of opinion turned to truth amongst the Brexit Voting participants. With none of the four factors ranking the statement at below +1, all four types agreed with the statement “The Remain campaign, made up of the corporate establishment, arrogant Europhiles and foreign banks, have set out to terrify us all about life outside the EU”.

This statement was purely based on opinion, but it achieved wide consensus amongst all Brexit voter types identified. They were unified in their agreement to this statement.

Another statement which also shows similar levels of consensus agreement (from +1 to +3) is that of Statement 10 “(working class voters) they are fed up and can show it”.

This statement, one of several in the Brexit Q-Sort, is one of only seven of the forty-eight statements to show consensus on this level.

The placing of both these statements amongst Brexit voters is important in answering both the sub research Question 1 and Hypothesis 2.

Importantly, it shows that at least to some extent Brexit voters believed in the idea of left-behind voters who were the “fed up working class” as it were. Although it was not a priority statement for any of them, it still held some value.

The presence of Statement 25 is more complex but is a useful illustrative tool in how opinion amongst the press was, in the case of Brexit, turned into a truth in the eyes of their target audience - the general public and, in this case, the young Leave voting participants themselves.

The overall answer to the primary research question with regards to young Brexit voters is tougher to answer.

Given the disdain shown by many to Remain positions across nearly all voter types, there does seem to be a significant base of political conflict. However, the views expressed within by participants have nuance and some Remain positions have positive receptions in some Q-Sort types. In other words, there is not a universal level of disdain or hatred amongst participants indicating at least some exaggeration on behalf of the newsprint media.

With regards to the Referendum, the question as to whether research participants believed that the media exacerbates conflict - the answer is a more clearly cut “yes”. As discussed in the relevant chapter, many of the participants felt strongly that the media had overplayed their hand or were too combative in their portrayal of the issue. As Participant G said with regards to Question 3 “Referenda might be easier if the papers didn’t seem to be trying to start a civil war during campaign time. Media is meant to inform not make people hate each other for different points of view.”

This sentiment, and others similar to it, echo throughout the opinions on the media amongst the Brexit participants. None of them may have been fond of Remain as an idea, but the vitriol from both sides of the media seems to be a common critique on all sides.

As occurred with regard to the discourse network analysis in the previous section, the difference amongst those who voted Conservative in the 2017 General Election compared to those who voted Brexit was a yawning chasm. Whilst the differences between Brexit voters was often relatively subtle, the difference between Conservative voters was more extensive.

Unlike with the Brexit voting participants, there were no negative loadings amongst the Conservative voters and three distinct factors were found. They are as follows:

- 1. The Exasperated Conservative Voter** who found the sheer incompetence of the Conservative campaign to be completely inexcusable with particular vitriol and blame placed on the shoulders of Theresa May.
- 2. The Loyalist Conservative Voter** who was both loyal to the Conservative party and to May and how the campaign went.

3. The Realistic Conservative Voter who was the most willing to begrudge Jeremy Corbyn a little respect in how he ran his campaign and always felt that the General Election was never a sure thing.

All three of these voter types differ drastically with one another. In fact, they differ far more drastically in terms of overall opinion than any of the four Brexit voter types do with each other.

Despite, or perhaps even because of, their significant differences it is very easy for certain conclusions to be drawn. Instantly, it becomes clear that the young Conservative voters are not homogenous to any particularly strong degree between the three voter types. With some rabidly against Theresa May and others willing to deflect most criticism away from her, there is already not just a difference of opinion between the voter types but the potential for political conflict. The current differences within Conservative voters are less likely to lead to constructive compromise and debate and are more likely to lead to leadership challenges or fissures within the party. As is clear from the Q-Sorts, the differences in opinion here were very stark even on fundamental issues like May as a good choice for Prime minister and Factor 1 condemning two statements that praised May for her work in Europe (41 and 42) became the most disagreed with statements on the entire factor array. The consigning of these two statements to positions so far down the grid is in stark contrast to the relatively positive rating in the +1 and +2 sections that Factor 2 places them at.

Just from this small sample it is clear that any idea of a cohesive whole existing amongst them is a laughable prospect and those who voted Conservative amongst the young form a far broader church than those who voted Brexit amongst young voters from the data gathered.

There was no real prevalence of left-behind voters in the discourse around the election so the opinions of these Conservative voters on this issue remains unknown.

What is known however, is that nearly all the Q-Sorts together combine to form some excellent evidence in support of media turning opinion into truth and research participants treating that opinion as the clear truth! In this circumstance, the unifying figure is that of Mr Jeremy Corbyn who provides a unique point of unity amongst all the Conservative voter types. All of them are in

agreement that he is a Marxist and a terrorist sympathizer as well as likely to cause chaos for the country were he to achieve power, as I illustrate in the relevant chapter.

This unification around what is effectively just an opinion forged by the right-wing press has been turned into fact for these Conservative voters. Even as researchers it is difficult to deny that this opinion had solidified as fact for these voters, despite the natural caution we may feel in labelling it as such. The truth of the situation however, is undeniable. Whilst nearly every other issue was debated and contrasted between the three voter types, on Jeremy Corbyn and his personal deficits they are all united even if some may think he is not as incompetent in other areas such as having the ability to run a decent campaign. The fact remains however, that in this circumstance, as first stated in Chapter 2, the narratives around Jeremy Corbyn which began in the newsprint media have made the rounds and been present long enough in the media that they have become truths in the eyes of young Conservative voters.

As to whether the media exaggerates conflict in this incidence is far easier to say. The media has made Corbyn “the enemy” and articles that attack him will likely have a comparatively rapturous reception amongst those who vote Conservative. Corbyn has been made an enemy of traditional Conservative values by the right-wing media and in many respects the rest of the media has bought into this. The discussion in the chapter on Discourse Network Analysis in which Mr Corbyn’s unpopularity amongst the friendlier part of the press is a key aspect to this discourse. The conflict with Corbyn’s Labour is probably the conflict that the right-wing press more consciously exaggerates.

What is intriguing about the 2017 General Election news coverage is the evidence that the press was in fact exaggerating another conflict. Namely that of Theresa May with wider voters as well as with her party. The way in which Theresa May was treated during the campaign, including the number of disparaging articles about her manifesto, party campaign and overall performance as Prime Minister may have added further fuel to the fire that the Conservative campaign had begun to collapse. By the time the Press scaled down its attacks it was the last week of campaigning and outside events took over the narrative in a manner that denied Corbyn a majority but also deprived Theresa May of hers.

As to whether the newspapers exacerbated conflict, well the evidence was looking even starker. The constant attacks within the Conservative-supporting media with regards to Theresa May and to a lesser extent in the Labour-leaning media concerning Jeremy Corbyn, undoubtedly count as an exacerbation of the conflict. This is certainly true in the opinions of the young Conservative voters as Participant 1 so eloquently put it

“The Print media should rely less on general stereotypes of the parties and their leaders e.g. “The Nasty Party” and “Communist Corbyn”. These make it harder to take campaigns at face value and I think these stereotypes distort reality and lead to ‘shocks’ like in the 2017 election.”

Despite not explicitly mentioning conflict, the message and tone behind Participant 1’s answer is very clear. The print media had done its best to shape and exaggerate the situation. It had increased the conflict through the dissemination of information and stereotypes in a way which led to shocks to the overall system as a whole.

This sentiment regarding the press was widespread amongst participants in their answers with many bemoaning the coverage that occurred and with more than a few not just angry with how the Conservative campaign had gone but chagrined and irritated with a media that, had it reported differently, could have enabled better results.

The Q-Sorts in Relation to the overall Media Picture

As can be seen, the results of the Q-Sort methodology therefore match with what the overall picture painted by the discourse network analysis appeared to show and there were no particular surprises from the tone and spread of the Q-Sorts compared to their respective overall media pictures.

The tone of the Brexit debate found in the discourse network analysis was one that was highly polarised with little exchange of views across the aisle in most cases. It was full of discourses that were to be expected and threw up no major surprises having read the literature surrounding media perceptions of the EU. The Brexit-leaning papers continued to unambiguously lean towards Brexit even if this meant discounting positive information about the EU which was being disseminated by the Remain campaign. The quick adoption and then further

proliferation of terms such as Project Fear by the newspapers allowed them to once more set the agenda and turn an opinion into something close to a fact. By the end of the period covered by the discourse even Remain-leaning papers were starting to buy into the fact that the Remain campaign had been a negative force primarily focused on scaring people to vote to stay in the EU.

The Q-Sorts of the participants reflected the Brexit-leaning media's comparative stranglehold on setting the terms of the debate. This can be seen in the adoption and agreement of many of the media's talking points as correct and as the Remain-leaning media had adopted many of these talking points and treated them as gospel truth, it was highly unlikely that a Leave voter would work further to verify their overall accuracy.

Therefore, whilst the Q-Sort's results may not exactly match what was first thought to occur, they make perfect sense in the context of the discourses that were extrapolated from the use of Discourse Network Analyzer and which were sorted ultimately into the collection of 48 statements that respondents used in the Q-Sort process.

The General Election Q-Sorts can also be said to yield results that fall under a large field of what could potentially be expected from the far more chaotic discourses that were seen to surround the General Election.

After the chaos observed in the General Election discourses, there were no sure-fire results that could be easily expected amongst Q-Sort participants. When discourses are as volatile as the ones that were observed in the General Election campaign, making a prediction on what Q-Sorts would be the most likely to occur would be a fool's errand.

In line with expectations, respondents' Q-Sorts ran the gauntlet of Q-Sorts to be expected which ranged from the highly critical of Theresa May, to supportive of Theresa May, to those that never thought all that much of her to begin with and objected to the calling of the General Election in the first place. This vast gulf between these types of voters echoed the various factions found in the analysis of the media.

The various respondents in many respects also turned inward just as the media did in the 2017 General Election and focused on those within their party who

they felt had damaged their chances. Some respondents blamed May, some blamed the media and Participant 9 notably seemed to blame all parties involved, washing their hands clean of the entire situation.

The chaos reflected in the discourse network analysis was mirrored in the views of respondents and the similar levels of despair, anger and feelings of clutching at straws for comfort which were present in the General Election discourse were echoed albeit with the passage of time in the answers of respondents.

The only thing that could be agreed upon as mentioned before was the status of Corbyn among both Conservative-leaning papers and Conservative voters. Like a lifeboat in a sea of confusion and recriminations, the status of Corbyn as the overall villain in British politics remained stable amongst both the papers and participants. This remained the case throughout the process evidencing just how successful the painting of Corbyn as dangerous to the country had been in the right-wing press.

Initial assumptions and why these did or did not come to pass.

As can be seen in this chapter, there were a number of findings which matched with overall expectations made at the beginning of the study, but there were also significant differences to what had originally been expected. Answers to the key research questions are comparatively clear in some respects whilst murkier in others. The reasons why this might be the case and the extent to which the questions were answered overall will be explored here.

Firstly, and most importantly, is the key research question of the entire project:

1. Do media portrayals of sides in a debate exaggerate political conflict and do research participants think that they exacerbate it?

The initial assumption on the answer to this question were that media portrayals would exaggerate political conflict and the initial thoughts were that given the aggressive and partisan nature of much of the UK press, respondents were likely to find that the press exacerbated political conflict as well.

The initial findings of the literature review offered a promising start in answering this question. The pervasive influence of Brexit in much of the press and the ultimate effects, including long term exaggeration on a variety of issues associated with the EU, were a good starting point to build upon with respect to

the issue, as Brexit clearly fell under the parameters of significant exaggeration in conflict. On a more partisan basis, the exaggeration of conflict was not as immediately obvious. Due to the comparatively centrist changes brought about by New Labour and the support of the Murdoch Press throughout most of the 1997-2010 Labour government, there was limited partisan conflict in the press compared to what happened after the Murdoch papers returned to the Conservative fold.

The initial findings expected at the onset of the study continued for the discourse network analysis of Brexit which, despite first appearances to the contrary, showed itself to be as predicted. This was especially clear once the discourse network analysis was properly studied and showed very few divergences from initial expectations. It was only in the discourse network analysis of the General Election that the first big surprise of the research came about. The views within this discourse network analysis seemed to resemble a chaotic battle occurring both between and within the various media outlets as to the most basic facts. Papers seemed to have undergone split personalities with some papers arguing that Theresa May was the perfect Prime Minister for the job even whilst voices in the same paper decried her as being utterly useless. The Conservative supporting press gave the general impression of tearing itself apart over the decision to call an election with confusion as well as disbelief that the campaign was going so badly becoming common themes in articles.

Once again, the Brexit Q-Sorts panned out as expected and given the chaotic nature of the 2017 General Election coverage, it is perhaps not surprising that participants' reactions in the Q-Sorts were as varied as they were.

The irony is not lost on this researcher that some of the greatest conflict observed within the study was not a partisan one between Conservative and Labour or between Remain and Leave but was in fact the result of Conservative party in-fighting.

The political conflict undergone within the Conservative party had not been expected but once it was observed it proved to be a fascinating example of the media in action and the impact this can have on sides in a debate. The vicious in-fighting within the press left more than one Conservative voter cold with some

swearing off politics and elections altogether after the General Election campaign.

What was clear is that the Conservative voters in the study placed significant blame for the situation on the media and its general behaviour was harshly critiqued by most participants as clouding reality and leading to a less genial and more aggressive atmosphere of debate for the UK General Election. Whilst this was not as pronounced an attitude amongst the Brexit Campaign, it was still a present theme in answers to the questionnaire.

How much the media exaggerated the political conflicts is a subject still open to much debate. Amongst participants the evidence was murkier on this issue as to whether something exaggerated from the truth is something which lies squarely in the eye of the beholder. What is an exaggeration for some is an understatement for others, thus is the nature of truth in modern society in which an abundance of information can quickly be gathered in a short period of time to either support or critique any particular stance.

Participants are far clearer on the degree to which the media exacerbated political conflict. Almost without exception though the answer was a resounding “yes” with little in the way of qualifications that this was a unique circumstance.

The next research question was also one in which the answer raised surprises.

2. Are Leave Referendum and Conservative party General Election voters more nuanced in their political positions and values than media portrayals imply?

Initial assumptions when forming this research question were that portrayals in the press were likely to be relatively simplistic, but voters themselves would prove to be more complex than media portrayals might imply. This turned out to be almost exactly what happened although not as was initially anticipated.

With regards to Brexit, the initial research on the news media showed a fairly uniform Eurosceptic attitude in the lead up to the Referendum campaign which kept a variety of similar arguments ongoing throughout. When the campaign occurred though, there was something that was slightly surprising amongst the Brexit-leaning press. Although the Brexit-leaning press continued with most, if not all, the arguments they had used before, they began to open into new

avenues of argument such as left-behind voters and the benefits of leaving the European Union for the NHS.

This was initially surprising but given that the overall news media stuck with the same narratives whilst also adding new ones meant that the overall effect remained the same. The Brexit newspapers were still pro-Brexit whilst the Remain newspapers were still pro-Remain. Nevertheless, significantly more nuanced debates had become part of the conversation amongst the Brexit-leaning news media. Whether these new avenues were to reach beyond traditional readership to encourage voters who were undecided to vote Leave or to reassure and solidify voters already leaning towards Leave that they were making the correct ethical choice is a question for other political researchers. What is certain however, is the Brexit position was more nuanced in the media than it had been previously before the Referendum period.

As for the Conservative Party's portrayal by the media, it is safe to say that on this occasion the Press showed far more nuance than is typical during an election campaign. The Good, The Bad and The Ugly were all aired by the Conservative-leaning media during this campaign and every type of potential Conservative voter was given representation in the media during this time. Whether the inclusion of articles about young Conservative voters was due to Jeremy Corbyn's perceived popularity amongst this group again is a question for other researchers, but the inclusion of such articles focused on a group that typically does not vote Conservative showed some of the subtleties that arose out of the, sometimes, hysterical coverage the election experienced.

These nuances amongst the coverage were unexpected at first. This is not surprising given past media coverage on elections which tended to be significantly calmer and in which groups like the youth were often discarded as irrelevant. Due to the dearth of coverage on referenda, the subtleties that were seen in the media during the campaign could not easily be predicted especially when the only other Referendum for which coverage could be analysed which had occurred in the UK in recent years were those of the voting system and Scottish independence, both of which are entirely different issues.

That the media was capable of the levels of nuance it did show were surprising and had not originally been foreseen. However, voters proved to be even more

nuanced than the media was on both issues. There was no uniform Brexit voter type nor was there a uniform Conservative voter type found across the participants. Participants showed significant differences of opinion even beyond what was originally presumed.

In the case of Brexit Voters, for example, there were those who disagreed with the notion that leaving the European Union would be good for the NHS, those who agreed that disentanglement from the EU could be a long painful process and those felt that Brexit wouldn't be totally cost free. This variation wasn't expressed in nearly as much detail in the press in which arguments were often portrayed in a far more black and white manner. Whilst there might have been nuance in the new arguments chosen, the main thrust of the argument remained the same. This was not represented in media portrayals of Brexit voters who tended to be lumped into one broad category of those who were left-behind or outside of the establishment. These were the only portrayals of Leave voters that saw the light of day to any significant degree.

With regards to Conservative voters, the media portrayals did manage to find some nuance when the Conservative-leaning press was not engaging in a war against its own favoured political party. As previously mentioned, the thoughts on young voters that the papers managed to express acknowledged the fact that not all voters were those in their later years and that there were some young voters or potential young supporters out there for the Conservative party. However, these portrayals fell significantly by the wayside compared to the number of articles portraying the conflict during the campaign period.

As such, the full scope of nuance amongst young Conservative voters was not fully captured and indeed, in many ways, it would have been impossible for the papers of the time to capture it. The result of the Election of 2017 split young Conservative voters just as it split all Conservative voters as can be seen in the different voter types that were present. The split which the result would render in the Conservative party could not have been predicted at the time, especially as every day after the election attitudes were liable to harden further on issues.

Therefore, in line with what was originally presumed, Conservative and Brexit voters were both more nuanced than media portrayals originally suggested. However, this was not as originally thought because newspaper media was

wholly without nuance in their portrayals of voters, as they actually demonstrated far more than was originally assumed. It was in fact due to how young Conservative and Brexit voters were even more complex than had originally been presumed with opinion far more wide-ranging than initial research or common knowledge gleaned from media sources would have implied.

The final research question was answered exactly as was initially assumed and in fact, the effect may have been even more pronounced than was first hypothesised.

3. Has the media successfully turned opinion on different sides into truths in the eyes of their target audience? To what extent do research participants treat media opinion as truth?

The initial thoughts when this question was first posed was that some opinions which were close to a wide consensus amongst the general public might be viewed as being truth in the eyes of newspapers' target audiences. It was also assumed that most research participants, all of whom were undergoing higher education, would be more likely to question media opinion and less likely to accept it as easy truth.

Instead, what was discovered was in many respects disheartening for anyone who places value on objectively provable facts and figures.

As opposed to what was initially presumed at the onset of this thesis, the work of others in this area concerning agenda setting by the print media and the influence this had, quickly made apparent that the print media had significant sway in regulating the information and narratives which became prevalent in the more generalised media.

The discourse network analysis quickly showed how the media presented opinionated statements as facts, often with lurid headlines. They would use a few facts nestled within to support hearsay or opinion as unarguable truth. This was seen throughout both sets of discourses as immigration was painted as though it was a problem and always will be and Corbyn was painted as a terrorist sympathizer or a communist/Marxist. These discourses were highly prevalent for both the EU Referendum and the General Election, and by the

time the EU Referendum had come around, both were close to being seen as inarguable facts in most of the newspapers covered. The fact that the nominally left-leaning *Guardian* also seemed to at least partly buy into this, demonstrates the extent and scale to which these opinions had become viewed as fact in the eyes of not just their target audience but their nominal political opponents.

The answers of research participants were not ones that would restore faith in the ability for facts to remain of paramount importance. It was immediately clear that most participants had bought certain opinions with regards to the Brexit debate and had begun seeing them as fact. In particular, the stereotyped view of Remain had been made into a fact with all four Brexit voter types agreeing with the opinion, although it was heartening that it was not in the highest agreed part of the matrix.

The General Election campaign demonstrated this transformation of opinion into fact even more effectively. As mentioned numerous times during this chapter, the media's portrayal of Corbyn and the opinions it had attached to him from Day 1 of his leadership (and even before that in his leadership campaign) have paid significant dividends. At this point, Corbyn is viewed as a terrorist sympathizer by many, he is viewed as a Marxist by many and the idea of his premiership being a disaster is agreed upon by many as well. Amongst the right, opinions on Corbyn that may only have a hint of fact in them, have been turned into truths among research participants. When the newsprint media's portrayal of Corbyn is one of the only parts of the Q-Sort that all participants agree upon, most of them strongly, that is a clear sign that at least in this case, opinion has been readily accepted as fact by participants.

Therefore, of the three research questions to which an answer was sought, there is an interesting collection of results. Initial assumptions may have been wrong in some cases, especially with the wild card that was the 2017 General Election, but the overall answers for the most part were not completely different from initial expectations, with the exception of the media's skill in transforming its opinion into fact, not just in the eyes of its readers but in the eyes of those participants of the Q-Sorts.

Of the original three hypotheses which were researched, it was difficult to arrive at any clear conclusions with the exception of the first hypothesis.

1. Not all Conservative Party or Leave voters agree with many key Leave/Conservative policy issues.

Of all the hypotheses this is the only one in which a significant amount of evidence could be found in its favour. Many key Leave promises, as previously discussed, were actively debated amongst participants in the Q-Sorts and there was no consistent agreement with all policies, with quite significant disagreement on some, including how Brexit should be carried out. The same was true of Conservative voters, particularly regarding plans involving pensioners and social care which May eventually U-turned on, amongst a variety of other issues. The fact that there were such significant differences between voters on these issues means that as of now, we can safely not reject this hypothesis as inaccurate due to the substantial evidence in favour which were found in the Q-Sorts.

2. Both Conservative Party and Leave voters will agree with media portrayals of left-behind voters.

This hypothesis was more difficult to find an answer to within the information found in the Q-Sorts. What is clear is that left-behind voters, despite being a major talking point in the aftermath of the 2016 Referendum, did not feature nearly so prevalently during the Referendum campaign. However, although these narratives were not prevalent, they were present and there were several Brexit participants who were highly supportive of the ideas associated with left-behind voters such as those of an abandoned working class. However, these attitudes were not universal to any great extent amongst Brexit participants.

With regards to Conservative voters, the idea of left-behind voters never even entered into the picture. Had it been a normal campaign there is a chance these narratives may have appeared once more, but the General Election campaign was, as previously mentioned, significantly abnormal in how the discourses evolved and developed.

Overall left-behind voters, despite their appearance as a major talking point in popular media, simply didn't have a big enough impact in the discourses on Brexit to support the hypothesis to any great degree. Meanwhile in the media analysis of the General Election these portrayals did not really appear to any degree at all.

As a result, this hypothesis can be tentatively rejected utilising the participants responses and media studies. Although it is not out of the range of possibility that a more extensive use of discourse network analysis may find more supporting evidence for it, there was not enough evidence in this case to allow the hypothesis to stand firm.

3. Both Conservative Party and Leave voters will hold strong views on caricaturised portrayals of voters and Parties from both their side and the losing side.

This hypothesis was in many ways directly split. Some aspects to it had significant evidence attached whilst others did not. Conservative voters had very strong views on the caricatures of Corbyn and Corbyn's Labour, as has been discussed previously in this chapter, with particular focus on Corbyn as a Marxist and terrorist sympathizer. The caricaturised portrayal of Corbyn, and his party as an extension, were a prominent feature of all of the Conservative Q-Sorts.

Similarly, the general caricaturised view of Remain as a whole, was also one that found significant evidence within the Brexit voters Q-Sorts. The idea of Remain as 'arrogant and apart' was prominent in many of the Q-Sorts, as were other broad Remain caricatures.

However, specific caricatures with regards to voters on both their sides (the winning side and the losing side) were not as common. As previously mentioned, the portrayal of many Brexit voters as left-behind voters was not universally agreed upon and on numerous occasions was not actively disagreed with either but treated somewhat neutrally. Specific caricatures with regards to Labour and Conservative voters were not particularly prevalent amongst the Brexit or General Election discourse as previously mentioned and those few caricatures that there were, concerning young voters and Jeremy Corbyn, did not experience widespread approval or disapproval.

Thus, this hypothesis finds itself in somewhat of a no man's land as significant aspects to it cannot be rejected without supporting evidence entirely. It is certainly a hypothesis that others could pick up on in the future with a larger array of data which may be able to fill in the blanks.

Why were the findings different from initial expectations?

The question as to why findings differed from initial expectations other than those reasons given above are not overly numerous but are still of some importance.

Firstly, a key reason that some initial assumptions may have been incorrect is that as a researcher I myself may have fallen under the spell of the newspaper media. Part of the initial focus of this dissertation was pursued because of the media's focus on left-behind voters in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum. It is only after significant study and analysis that I have found this narrative, which was a popular one after the fact, did not appear so common during the Referendum time-period and was completely absent from the General Election. Tied in with these assumptions were the broad statements made by the press about voters after the Referendum which I also theorised would be present in discourses leading up to the Referendum. The fact that these discourses were less prominent than I first theorised and were once again mostly absent during the General Election also goes some way to explain the discrepancies.

Secondly, some of the initial assumptions made after reading the research were not borne out by direct study due to a deficit of articles and information directly concerning the Referendum and General Election. This is a common problem in most academic research. Although we can build on those who have gone before us and hope that they can guide us on paths we can follow when engaging in new territory, the reality is far more difficult. At the time of writing, more research is being published every day which can be utilised in future projects such as this. At present however, both the Brexit Referendum and the 2017 General Election are still relatively new ground to cover, so we can only utilise close substitutes in academic research to form initial assumptions and hypotheses.

Finally, the time lag between the initial commencement of the research project (shortly after the 2017 General Election) and the point at which the Q-Sorts were administered (around March – May of 2019) was fairly lengthy. It is my belief however, that this did not have as significant a result as first might be assumed. There was still a variety of pro-May sentiment even during the period covered and the Election and Referendum were fresh in all participants' minds.

Attitudes may have hardened somewhat due to outside factors, but the data within and the opinions of the campaigns were still prominent in people's minds. It is quite possible that due to the Brexit deadline looming during the period at which the Q-Sorts were administered that both Brexit and the General Election were pushed to the forefront of people's minds as opposed to being in the background as they would have been in mid-2018.

However, overall most of the assumptions made in the research questions were answered and the results were not divorced from what was originally expected. The most surprising find in this investigation were the discourses surrounding the 2017 General Election which were far more surprising and even more combative than was first expected and are areas that I would suggest for further study on issues regarding how media and personal opinion interact.

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CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the previous discussion chapter, the overarching aim of this thesis in attempting to find out if the newspaper industry continues to enjoy something close to the influence it had in years gone by, was, to a certain extent fulfilled through the data gathered from the thirty participants of this study.

Initial assumptions on the power of the newsprint press, if anything, understated the importance that the newspapers of the United Kingdom still enjoy in most cases, at least amongst the group analysed here. The national newspapers demonstrate a continued ability to influence and shape the opinions of even those members of the population who would not typically be exposed to them in their standard hard paper format.

Decreased circulation numbers, as most of the UK press has experienced, would lead many to conclude that the influence of the national papers of the UK was in decline, but when it comes to the young voters involved in this study who supported Brexit and the Conservative Party, this would not appear to be the case.

In exploring the discourses produced by DNA and the resulting Q-Sort and questionnaire data extrapolated from that, the power of the national print media would still, from the participants studied, be significant in influencing political debate in the UK. The UK press continues to be capable of fostering political conflict far outside their conventional sphere of influence, regardless of whatever initial assumptions on the overall decline of their industry might first lead one to think.

This study therefore, provides an interesting insight into the significant sway that the media foists upon even those outside of their initial target audiences. This is especially surprising given the common wisdom that the press as a powerful broker of knowledge is in decline.

It should be noted though that whilst these results are fascinating and, in most cases, comparatively clear cut with regards to the hypotheses, it must also be acknowledged that the data set was in many respects limited due to the

participants involved, even though this was intentional by the design of the study.

The location of the participants in Cornwall, on a campus that has benefited from EU funding, may have affected the sort of Leave-leaning participants willing to be a part of the study. Therefore, a campus in a different part of the country in a more heavily Leave (or more heavily Remain) area may have yielded a different set of responses.

In addition, it should also be acknowledged that the time which had elapsed from the events in question until the participants engaged in the research was considerable, which arguably could have caused some contamination of the result. The issues of Brexit and the 2017 General Election were still salient at the time that the research took place. However, it is possible that the length of time which had elapsed, led to a distortion of the type of opinions which may have prevailed immediately after the relevant events had taken place. Ironically, if the press maintains the influence that some of the results show, then this may even be a likely contributing factor to explaining why certain narratives that were not dominant amongst participants were dominant amongst media coverage at the time. Nevertheless, as time has elapsed it can also be theorised that the effects of time may have allowed voters of both the Referendum and the General Election to obtain more clarity over the situation. This clarity potentially allowing for a more solidified opinion on the events that had taken place in comparison to opinions that would have occurred immediately after those same events. Therefore, it must be conceded that opinions may have hardened, whereas if the study had been undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the two events, they may not have, hence the study provided opinions that may not have been accurate had the Q- Sort been administered immediately. This in itself offers additional opportunities for further research as to whether such an effect may be encountered in similar studies using similar methods. This can aid future researchers in ensuring any potential effect can be accounted for and potentially negated by using a more immediate response time.

Another potential weakness to the study is that although the results of the study do suggest a causal link (as discussed above) this may not in fact be the case. To counteract this and find out if there might truly be a link, additional investigations into media consumption habits may have helped. Particularly as

the evidence discussed earlier implies young people's consumption of direct newspaper media reporting is lower than other cohorts of the population. Whilst this may be a shortcoming, the initial evidence does suggest that the newspaper media influences the overall discourse even if the papers themselves are not directly consumed by young Leave and young Conservative Voters.

Finally, the size of the sample present in the study will always pose an issue. The scale of this study was a small one even for the size of the campus in which the research took place and whilst this may make for a more valid study, and with a similar set of figures possibly a fairly reliable study (especially if it were to be repeated at a similar campus), the generalizability of the results is at this stage very limited.

Despite the potential drawbacks to this study, there are new pathways to research that could potentially further validate its conclusions or provide significant critiques to how it was carried out. Further research steps along the themes discussed here would be to significantly expand upon the scope of papers and places that were covered in this study. The unique media climate that exists in other countries which have a less centralized national press than the UK would likely pose additional challenges and insights to see whether the position of the British press in the UK is unique to what this study has found.

A discourse network analysis of the major US papers around the most recent Presidential Election would likely offer a very different discourse to investigate than the type of discourses found in the UK due to significant differences between the various States. Work is already underway in the United States with the discourse analysis of six American newspapers performed by Ledouble and Marty (2019) on the Trump election of 2016. It is a good example of similar work to the initial stages of this study. Further studies on the narratives surrounding the upcoming Election campaign of 2020 in America would add even more to this field. Perhaps even more interesting would be an investigation of some of the countries in Europe which have significant regional or provincial identities (such as in Spain, Germany, France or Italy) whose local papers may add a different element in studying discourses around elections and referenda.

On the domestic front, as previously mentioned, an analysis of additional papers here could be a possible avenue for further research. Utilisation of local press, for example, and the impact that could potentially have is one possible place of expansion for the ideas covered here. This is especially relevant taking into account the importance of local politics on electoral and referendum campaigns. The opportunity for exploration in these areas, by contrasting with national media campaigns, could offer an interesting theme for exploration in further studies.

In addition, a study that has taken place in one university location in the UK would have added credibility if its results could be replicated in other locations, so that a more accurate and generalizable picture could be obtained. An expanded study taking into account different universities around the country for similar studies on media effects could further analyse and take forward the steps taken here. One study utilising these methods on this question does not grant any monopoly on media effects on young voters with regards to Brexit and the 2017 General Election, even if the combination of methods here may add something comparatively different to what has gone before. An expansion on the combination of methods used here at other universities could grant a more complete picture and further test whether this methodology is accurate.

When it comes to using Q-Sort methodology in researching issues such as the media and its influence on the mindset of the British public, I find it hard to imagine a more suitable and useful instrument for gathering a broad spectrum of opinion in such a short space of time. Q-Sort methodology may be time consuming if done rashly and can be complex to set up (and understand easily!) but it offers so many benefits to political scientists that it should be utilised with more frequency. Its relative scarcity in contemporary political research is explainable (especially given its limitations with regards to time) but given its potential usefulness, its comparative neglect in political science is inexcusable despite the constraints in its utilisation. Q-Sort methodology is not a popular method of obtaining data in political research at present but in my personal experience it marries perfectly with the statements and narratives that can be found using discourse network analysis. Q-Sort methodology, despite its complexities would be a major asset to any researcher attempting to investigate personal opinions of media discourses in the future. Continued development of

this particular tool would present significant advantages to political scientists with regards to data output. It may seem unwieldy at first, but once it is correctly utilised it can become a very powerful analytical tool.

Ultimately, this study raises interesting questions about young voters and the newsprint media's continuing influence with some surprising results concerning their continuing power. However, further investigations are required before more concrete claims can be made concerning these findings.

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